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BROKEN TO HARNESS

A Story of English Domestic Life

BY

EDMUND YATES

“Mit dem Gürtel, mit dem Schleier,
Reisst der schöner Wahn entzwei.”

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

THIRD EDITION



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CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. AFTER THE STORM	1
II. THE PAPER BULLET	30
III. HALF-REVEALED	53
IV. THE HOUSE OF MOURNING	83
V. ET TU BRUTE!	113
VI. BALTHAZAR	131
VII. "BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT"	147
VIII. MINISTERING ANGELS	164
IX. UNDER PRESSURE	189
X. "WE KISSED AGAIN WITH TEARS"	215
XI. GOING HOME	236
XII. THE DAY AFTER	252
XIII. AND LAST	264


BROKEN TO HARNESS.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER THE STORM.


As you sit in the bow-window of your comfortable lodging at your favourite watering-place during your annual autumn holiday, your breakfast finished and the *débris* removed, the newspaper rustling idly on your knees, and the first and pleasantest pipe of the day between your lips, you look up and see the aspect of affairs in the little street below very much changed from its normal state. The pleasure-boats — the *Lively Nancy*, which sails so regularly at eleven A.M. with a cargo of happy excursionists, and which arrives in port at irregular intervals varying from one to three, laden with leaden-coloured men and hope-

lessly-bedraggled fainting women; the *William and Ellen*, in which you go out to catch codling and plaice; and all the other little craft usually stationed on the beach—have been bodily removed, their owners and touters are drinking rum and smoking shag-tobacco in evil-smelling little public-houses, and their customers have no notion of putting them into requisition. The bathing-machines,—those cumbrous vehicles in which you have so often made that dread journey into the ocean, after being bidden to “stand by” while the horse gives his first awful jerk and afterwards dashes you against the sides of your travelling-prison, while you catch horribly-distorted glimpses of your wretched countenance in the miserable little sixpenny looking-glass pendant from the rusty nail and swinging here and there like a live thing convulsed,—the bathing-machines have all been dragged from the spot where they ordinarily stand like a row of hideous guardians of the coast, and have defiantly taken possession of one side of the little main street. The place where the German band subsidised by the town usually pours forth



its perpetual iteration of the "Faust" waltz is now covered with roaring plunging waves, thick brown walls of water rearing their white crests a hundred yards off, as if in survey of their ultimate goal, tearing madly onward, gathering in size and strength at every stride, and at length discharging themselves with a thunder-crash in a blinding avalanche of spray. These waves, this roaring seething mass of trembling turgid water, is the great attraction to-day. In vain the monkey on the three-legged table clashes his cymbals, or plies the ramrod of his gun with frantic energy; in vain the good-looking Italian boy, his master, shows his gleaming teeth or touches his hat to attract attention; in vain the Highlander blows discord into his bagpipes until all the neighbouring dogs possessing musical ears are howling in misery. Nobody cares for any thing but the sea to-day; the little parade is thronged with visitors all gazing seaward, all rapt in attention on the boiling waters; at one point, where the waves dash in and sweep over the solid masonry, boys rush in between the ebb and flow, returning

happy if they have escaped, happier if they have been soaked by the spray. People look out all round and scan the horizon to see if there be any craft in sight, inspired with that singular feeling which only Rochefoucauld has dared to define, the feeling which sends crowds to watch Blondin's walk upon the high-rope, or the performances of a lion-tamer,—the feeling which, in a lesser extent, originates the sensation-loving element in us, and which is about the lowest in degraded human nature. Far away, at the end of the worm-eaten sea-besoaked jetty, is a little cluster of fishermen in dreadnaught and sou'-westers, patiently watching the weather, which to them is no toy nor amusement, but that on which hang their hopes of daily bread; and they will tell you if you ask them, that these big breakers thundering on to the shore are the result of some great storm that has taken place far away in the heart of the Atlantic; and that though the tempest is probably over now, these creations of its fury, these evidences of its wrath, will continue to roll and surge and foam for days to come.



So it was with the Adullam-Street household and its surroundings. The storm that had swept through it had been short, sharp, and decisive; but the traces of its wrecking power were visible long, long after it had past.

At first it seemed impossible for Frank Churchill to understand the extent of the misery which had fallen upon him. However roseate might have been the dreams which he had indulged in of the blisses of matrimony, he had lived too long in the world not to know that few indeed were the couples whose lives were not checked by some occasional difference. These, he had been told, generally occurred in the early portion of a matrimonial career, while the two persons were each unaccustomed to the peculiarities of the other, and while ignorance was, to a great extent, supported and backed up by obstinacy and pride. The unwillingness of each to give way would eventually result in a clash, whence would arise one of those domestic differences popularly known as "tiffs," in which the actors, though horribly wretched in themselves and disagreeable

to each other, were supremely ridiculous to the rest of the world, which either affected to be blind or sympathising, and in either case was sniggering in its sleeve at the absurdity of the scene. But these little sparring-matches were usually of short duration; and though a constant repetition of them might have a tritulating effect upon the original foundation of love and constancy, yet Churchill had noticed that long before such a fatal result occurred, the sharp angles and points had generally become gradually rounded off and rubbed down, and the machine had begun to work harmoniously and with regularity. At all events no open scandal took place. That open scandal, if not an actual healer of wounds, is a rare anodyne to impulsive spirits and hearts, thumping painfully against the tightened chain which day by day, with corroding teeth, is eating its way into their core. Exposure, publicity in the press, Mrs. Grundy—these are the greatest enemies of the Divorce-Court lawyers; heavy though the list of cases standing over for hearing may be, it would be fifty times heavier could the

proceedings be kept secret. Hundreds of couples now living together, hating each other "with the hate of hell;" scowling, carping, badgering, wearing, maddening, to desperation driving, from the hour they rise till the hour they retire to rest and fall asleep,—the one cursing his life, the other feebly bemoaning her fate, or openly defiant, "each going their own way;" a state of being more horrible, loathsome, and pitiable even than the other,—would be disunited, were it not for the public scandal. "For the sake of the children," for the scandal which would be entailed on their offspring, Mrs. Emilia will not leave Mr. Iago; and so they continue to live together, while the children are daily edified spectators of the manner in which their father treats their mother, and listen to the constantly-renewed expression of Mrs. Emilia's wish in reference to the possession of that whip with which to lash the rascal (their father) naked through the world.

The exposure—the public scandal! To no one had these words more terror in their sound than to Frank Churchill. All his life he had shrunk

from every chance of notoriety: had gloried in being able to work anonymously: not for the sake of shirking any responsibility, not from the slightest doubt of the right and truth and purity of whatever cause he might be advocating: but because when he had shot his bolt, and hit his mark, as he generally did, he could stand calmly by and mark the result, without being deafened by empty pæans or sickened by false flattery. His horror of publicity had been extreme; he had invariably refused all details of his history to contemporary biographers, and had never been so deeply disgusted as when he saw some of his work tracked home to its author by the gossiping correspondent of a provincial paper. It was good work too, work creditable to his brain and his heart; yet had it been penny-a-lining written to order, he could not have been more annoyed at being accredited with it. And now the full garish eye of day was to be let into the inmost recesses of his heart's sanctuary! "Break lock and seal, betray the trust!" let the whole world revel in the details. A domestic scandal, and one be-

smirching a man who, despite of himself, had made some name in the world, and a woman whose triumphs had rung through society, was exactly the thing which the "many-headed beast" would most delight in prying into and bandying about. The details?—there were no details; none, at least, which the world would ever hear of, or which would give the smallest explanation of the result. There was the fact of the separation, and nothing more; what led to it must be the work of conjecture, and people would invent all kinds of calumny about him; and—great Heaven!—about her. The lying world with its blistering tongue would be busy with her name, warping, twisting, inventing every thing—perhaps imputing shame to her, to her whose shield he should have been, to her whom he should have protected from every blow.

And here must be exhibited one of the flaws in Frank Churchill's by-no-means-perfect character. His wife had taken a step which nothing could excuse, had given way to her passion; and, in obedience to the promptings of rage and jealousy,

had done him an irreparable wrong, and covered them both with a reproach which would cling to them for life,—all this without any thing like adequate provocation on his part; so that he had been shamefully treated, and, had he been properly heroic, would have a fair claim upon your compassion, if not your admiration. But the truth is he was any thing but a hero; notwithstanding the manner in which his hopes had been blighted and his life wrecked, notwithstanding his having been deserted in that apparently heartless way by his wife,—he loved her even then with a passionate devotion; and when he thought of her, perhaps vilified and calumniated, without her natural protector, wretched and perhaps solitary, he had almost determined to fling his pride—nay, what he knew to be his duty—to the winds, to rush after her and implore her to come back to his home, and to do with him what she would. Of course nothing could have been more degrading to him than such a proceeding, and it was fortunate that good advice was coming to him in the person of his mother.

Coming in to pay her usual afternoon visit, the old lady walked straight to the study, and after tapping lightly at the door with her parasol-handle, she opened it and went in. She found her son seated at his desk, his head buried in his hands, which were supported by the projecting arms of the chair. His legs were stretched out before him, and he seemed lost in thought. He did not change his position at his mother's entrance, not until she addressed him by name; when, on raising his head, she saw the dull whiteness of his cheeks and the bistre rings round his eyes. She noticed too that his hands shook, and on touching them they were hot and dry.

"My boy," said the old lady gently, "you're not well, I'm afraid! what's the matter with you? too much of this horrid work, or—why, good God, Frank, there are marks of tears on your face! What *is* the matter,—what *has* happened?"

"Nothing, mother,—nothing to me at least, — don't be alarmed, dearest; I'm all right enough."

"Then Barbara's ill!" said Mrs. Churchill,

rising from the seat she had taken. "I'll go to her at once, poor thing——"

"You wouldn't find her, mother!" said Frank, in a very hollow voice. "She's not upstairs;—she's gone!"

"Gone! Gone where?" asked the old lady.

"Gone away—left me—gone away for ever!" and as the thought of his desolation broke with renewed force upon him, his voice nearly failed him, and it was with great difficulty that he prevented himself from breaking down.

"Left you—gone away—eloped!" cried the old lady, in whose mind there suddenly arose a vision of a yellow post-chaise, with four horses and two postillions, and Barbara inside, with Captain Lyster looking out of the window.

"No, no; not so bad as that," said Frank; "though horrible enough, in all conscience;" and he gave his mother a description of the scene which had occurred.

As Mrs. Churchill listened, it was plain to see that she was greatly moved; her hands trembled, and tears burst from her eyes and stole down her

cheeks. As the story proceeded, two feelings were struggling for the mastery within her—one, pity for her son; the other, indignation at her son's wife. The old lady, although now so quiet and retiring and simple, had lived in the world, and knew the ways and doings, the ins and outs, of its denizens. She had had tolerable experience of man's inconstancy, of his proneness to sin, of his exposure to flattery and liability to temptation. Had Frank confessed some slight flirtation with a pretty girl, some beneficence towards a female acquaintance of bygone times, she would have thought that Barbara had acted with worse than rashness in taking so decided a step; but now, when Frank told her that the letter which had provoked the final eruption was one which—had he not been pledged by its writer to be silent concerning, pledge given long before he had made Barbara's acquaintance—might have been read before the world, she believed her son fully, and could form no judgment too severe on Barbara's conduct. She was no vain-glorious Pharisee, to tell of the tithes she had given, the good she had

done; no humbler-minded sinner poured out a nightly tale of shortcomings and omissions to the Great Father: but when she thought of her own married life, when she recollected all Vance Churchill's frailties, all his drinking bouts and intrigues, all his carelessness and idleness, his neglect of his wife, his pettish waywardness, and constant self-indulgence; when she compared all this with Frank's calm steady laborious good life, and recollected that under all her provocation her husband had scarcely so much as a harsh word from her, she felt that Barbara's conduct had been outrageous indeed.

She said nothing at first, though her heart was full. With the tears rolling down her cheeks, she rose from her chair, and, taking up her position by her son, fell to smoothing his hair and passing her hand lightly over his brow, as she had done—oh, how many thousand times!—when he was a child; muttering softly, "My poor boy! oh, my poor boy!" The gentler spirit which had taken possession of Frank just before his mother's entrance grew and expanded under her softening

touch. He felt like some swimmer who, after a prolonged buffet with the angry waves, feels his feet, and knows that a few more strokes will bring him rest and home. There was a chance of nipping this wretched scandal in its bud, which was much; there was a chance of bringing his beloved to his side once more, which was all in all. After a time he broke the silence, cautiously sounding the depths.

"Do you think there's any chance of this horrible business being put straight, mother?" he asked.

"We are in the hands of God, my boy," replied the old lady, fervently. "Time is the great anodyne. HE may think fit to have it all set right in the course of time."

"Yes; but—I mean—you don't think it could be settled at once—to-night, I mean?"

"If she were to come back to-night, which she will not, and confess that her miserable pride and jealousy had driven her forth in a mad fit, and were to ask pardon, and be as she ought to be—God knows—humble and contrite, I would say let

there be an end of it; forget it all, and strive to live happier for the future. But if she remains away to-night—well, I don't know what to say;” and the old lady heaved a very intelligible sigh—a sigh which meant that in such an event the worst had arrived.

“Yes,” said Frank; his mind still dwelling on the little course he had proposed to himself,—“yes, of course, you don't think it would be right, then, to go to her——”

“Go to her!” echoed the old lady.

“Yes, go to her, and tell her how utterly wrong she had been—that there was not the slightest foundation for her suspicions; and that she had acted most unjustifiably in quitting her husband's house in the manner she has done; and——”

Old Mrs. Churchill had been sitting as if petrified, with her lips wide apart, during the delivery of this sentence; at this point she thawed into speech.

“Are you mad, Frank? has your misfortune turned your brain? You propose to go to her,—this woman, who has brought contempt on you—

and not only on you, on me and all our name,—and sue to her to come back, and box her ears playfully, and tell her what a naughty girl she has been! Do you imagine that this affair is any longer a secret, that it has not been talked over already between Mrs. Schröder's maid and your servants, between your servants and the tradespeople? Don't you know that if your wife is absent from your house to-night, the doubt will become a certainty, and that to-morrow the whole neighbourhood will be ringing with it? No!" continued the old lady; "it has come, and we must bear it. If that wicked girl—for I can't help feeling and saying that she is wicked in her present course—sees her error and repents, it will be your duty to forgive her and to take her back; but as to your humbling yourself by going to her and asking her to return, it's not to be thought of for a moment."

"I suppose you're right, mother," was all that Frank said—"I suppose you're right: we'll wait and see whether she comes back to-night."

So they waited, mother and son, through that

long evening. The day died out, and the dusk came down, and the lamps were lighted in the streets, and the pattering feet grew fewer and fewer; and still those two sat without speaking, without moving, immersed in their own thoughts; and still no Barbara returned. At length Mrs. Churchill, remembering that her son had had no dinner that day, grew tenderly solicitous about his health, and, crossing to him, raised his head and pressed her lips to his, and begged him to rouse himself and eat. And Frank, who felt himself gradually going mad with the one sad strain upon his thoughts, said:

“No, mother—not here, at all events. I must shake this off, if only for a few minutes, or I shall go out of my mind. I’ll take a turn in the air; and if I feel faint or to want any thing, I’ll go to the Club and get it. You go home and to bed, dearest; for you must be thoroughly knocked up with all my worries, which you are compelled to share; she won’t come back to-night—it’s all over now, and to-morrow we must face the future, and see what we’re to do with the rest of our lives.”


So they kissed again, and then went out together: Frank with a dead, dull, wearying pain at his heart; and his mother, sad enough to see him so sad, but with some little consolation mingled with her grief at the feeling that this event was not unlikely to bring her and her son more together again; to give her the chance of being in more frequent and more affectionate communication with that being whom she worshipped next to her Creator; of enjoying that to her inexpressible delight, of having her son "all to herself" again.

Leaving the old lady at the door of her lodgings, Frank strode on at a rapid pace, neither looking to the right nor to the left, seeing none of the people by whom he passed, thinking of nothing but his lost love. At length the long fasting he had undergone began to tell upon him, he felt sick and faint, and determined to go to his Club to get some refreshment,—not to the Flybynights; he could not have borne the noisy racket, the bewildering chaff, of that circle of free-lances; so he strode steadily down to Pall

4

Mall, and turned into the Retrenchment. Even that solemn temple of gastronomy and politics was far too lively for him in his then mood. The coffee-room was filled with a number of men who had dined late, many of whom, just returned from their autumnal expeditions, and not having met for a couple of months, had "joined tables," and were loudly talking over their holiday experiences. All was light and lively and jolly; and Frank felt, as he sat in the midst of them, like the death's-head at the banquet. At one table close by his four men were sitting over their wine, one of the number being rallied by the rest about his approaching marriage. "You're a lucky fellow, by Jove, Hope!" Frank heard one of them say; "I always said Miss Chudleigh was the prettiest girl out since the Lexden's year." "What's become of the Lexden—didn't she get married or something?" asked another. "Oh, yes!" answered the first — "married a man who's a member here. I don't know him; but a cleverish fellow, I believe. No tin—regular case of spoons, they said it was." "Mistake that?" said the *fiancé*,

whose future father-in-law was a wealthy brewer ; “spoons is all very well, but it wants something to back it.” “Ah, but it’s not every one that has your luck,” said old Tommy Orme, who just then joined the party—“nor, I will say, Hope, it isn’t every one that deserves it, by Jove!” and on the strength of that speech, old Tommy determined to borrow a ten-pound note from his friend on the first opportunity. Frank shuddered as he listened, and bent his head over his cutlet. “Was there any thing in what those men had said?” he asked himself, as he walked home. Could it have been that the state of comparative poverty into which he had brought his wife had soured her temper, rendered her jealous and querulous, and so disgusted her as to cause her to avail herself of the first excuse which presented itself for returning to her former life? It might be so, indeed. If it were, Frank was not disposed to think of her very uncharitably : he knew the whole wealth of love which he had bestowed upon her ; but he thought that her bringing-up might perhaps have rendered her incapable of appreciating it ; and he



went to his solitary bed with a feeling of something more than pity for his absent wife, after imploring peace to and pardon for them both in his prayers.

The evening of the next day, however, found him in a very different frame of mind. Not one word had been heard from Barbara; and the fact of her absence, and the manner of her departure, had been thoroughly well discussed throughout the neighbourhood. Early in the morning, Frank, with the conviction that all must eventually be known, had removed the seal from his mother's lips; and the old lady's circumstantial account, softened as much as her conscience would allow,—for she felt really more strongly than she had admitted about Barbara's defection,—was detailed to various knots of familiar friends throughout the day. The astonishment of the Mesopotamians was immense; immense their horror, deep the condemnation they poured upon the peccant one. The good women of the district could not realise what had occurred. If Barbara had eloped, they would have had some slight glimmering of it;

though an elopement was a thing which in their idea only occurred in highly aristocratic families. They had heard through the medium of the newspapers, stories of postchaise followed by postchaise speeding along the northern road, guilty wife and "gay Lothario" (Mesopotamian phrase for cavalier villany varying from seduction to waltzing) in the one, injured husband in the other. But how a woman could take herself off, leave her home and her husband, and send a servant for her things afterwards, my dear, as cool as if she were going by the railway train,—that beat them altogether. But though they could not understand, they could condemn, and did, in most unmeasured terms. Whatever the motive might have been, and the most energetic among them could not find in what was said any thing particularly damning ("in what is said, my dear; but I'm sure there must be something behind all this that we don't know of, but which will come out some day"),—whatever the motive might have been, there was the fact; that could not be got rid of or explained away: Mrs. Frank Churchill had

left her home and was not living with her husband. What more or less could you make of that? Some of them had seen it in her from the first.

There was something—one section said, in her eye, another in her manner—which showed discontent, or worse. “Something” in her walk which displeased many of them greatly—“as though the ground she trod upon was not good enough for her,” they said. And she who had held her head so high, for whom none of them were good enough, had come to this. Well, if being a fine lady and being brought up amongst great people led to *that*, thank goodness they were as they were.

Mrs. Harding had been one of the earliest to receive old Mrs. Churchill’s confidence, and had been so much astonished and impressed by what she heard, that she at once returned home and proceeded to rouse her husband, then peacefully sleeping off his hard night’s work. It must have been something quite out of the common to have prompted such a step, as George Harding was never pleased at having his hard-earned rest

broken in upon; but on this occasion his wife thought she had a complete justification. So she went softly into the closed room, undrew the curtains and let in the full morning sun; then she shook the sleeper's shoulder and called "George!" Harding roused himself at once and demanded what was the matter; he always had an idea, when suddenly awakened from sleep, that something had happened to the paper, either an Indian mail omitted, or a leader of the wrong politics inserted, or something equally dreadful in its result; and he had scarcely got his eyes fairly open, when his wife said, "Oh, my dear, such a terrible thing for poor Churchill!"

"What do you mean?" asked George, broad-awake in an instant; "nobody ill?"

"Oh, no, my dear; much better if it were. She's gone, my dear!"

"Who's gone; what on earth do you mean?" and then his wife told him the story circumstantially. And after hearing it George Harding dressed himself at once and went out to see his friend.

He found Churchill sitting in his little study, looking vacantly before him. There were no signs of work on the desk, no book near him; he had evidently been sitting for some time in a state of semi-stupor. He was very pale; but he looked up at the opening of the door and smiled faintly when he saw who it was. There was something so cheery in dear old George Harding's presence, that it shed light wherever he went, no matter how dark the surroundings: men who, as they knelt by the coffins of their wives, had prayed to God to take them then and there,—men who, contemplating the ruin sweeping down upon them, had horribly suggestive thoughts of the laudanum-bottle or the pistol-barrel,—had felt the dark clouds pass away at the sound of his genial voice and the sight of his hopeful face. But there were tears in George Harding's gray eyes as he took his friend's hand, and his voice shook a little as he said, "My dear old Frank! my poor dear fellow!"

"I'm hard hit, Harding, and that's the truth. You've heard all about it, of course?" Frank

asked nervously, fearing he might have again to recount the miserable history.

"Yes, my wife has told me,—she heard it from your mother, I believe,—and I came on at once. Do you know I'm horribly afraid, Frank, that it was from your taking my advice that this quarrel took place?"

"Your advice?"

"Yes, about tightening the curb. I told you, if you recollect, that I thought there should be a greater amount of firmness and decision in your manner to Mrs. Churchill, and—"

"Oh, you need not be anxious on that score; it must have come, sooner or later; and it's come sooner, that's all!"

"And what are you going to do?"

"Do? what do sensible men do when they have troubles? Grin and bear them, don't they? And so shall I. I can't live alone; so I shall instal my mother here again, and, I suppose, all will—will be pretty much as it was eighteen months ago."

"I was afraid from what my wife said, that

I should find you in some such mood as this," said Harding sternly. "One would think you were mad, Frank Churchill, to hear you talk such stuff. Don't you know that Mrs. Churchill is as much your wife before God and man as she ever was? Don't you feel that she has done nothing for which even the wretched laws which we in our mighty wisdom have chosen to frame would justify you in treating her in this way? I can understand it all; you've been worked upon by the chatter and magging of these silly women until you've lost your own calm common-sense. But don't you feel now, Frank, that I'm right? Don't you feel that a fit of rage, a mere wretched passing temper, is not the thing to separate those whom—you know I use it in no canting sense—those whom God has joined together? Don't you feel that it is your duty to go to her, or to send—I'll go if you like, though it's not a very pleasant office—to point out to her the miserable folly of this course, and to bring her back to her proper place—her home?"

"My dear Harding," said Frank quietly, "I

know you are sincere in your advice, but it is impossible for me to take it. My wife has subjected me to a very great outrage; and until that is explained and atoned for, I will never look upon or speak to her."


Harding would have said something more, but Churchill raised his hand in deprecation, and then changed the subject.

CHAPTER II.

THE PAPER BULLET.

LIKE the man and woman in the toy weather-house, Mr. Schröder's two houses never were "to the fore" at the same time. When the one was lighted, the other was gloomy; when the one was tenanted, the other was empty; when the one was decorated, the other was comfortless. As the second breath of summer came floating over Kensington Gardens, after the may- and apple-blossoms had disappeared, but long before dust and drouth had settled down on the greensward and the umbrageous walks of the parks; when there was evinced among young men a perpetual desire to dine at the Star-and-Garter at Richmond, and an undying hatred of passing the Sunday within the metropolis; when Mr. Quartermaine began to wonder where he should stow all his visitors, and Mr. Skindle of the

Orkney Arms began to think of building; when fashionable people thought it no more harm to sit in their carriages outside Grange's, than to call diamonds 'dimonds,' or ribbon 'ribbin;,' when the Sunday-afternoon attendance at the Zoological Gardens began to exceed the week-day; when green-peas began to have some taste, and asparagus to be something else beside stalk and stick,—then the glory of the Saxe-Coburg-Square establishment showed strong symptoms of waning. The usual amount of solemn dinner-party had been gone through; every body necessary had been asked to balls, music, and *conversazioni*; Mrs. Schröder's taste and Mr. Schröder's wealth had been exhibited constantly at the Opera and at some of the most fashionable gatherings in London; and one, if not both, of them longed for a little quiet. This resulted in the renting of Uplands, when blank misery fell upon the establishment in Saxe-Coburg Square. All the ornaments and nicknacks were removed and put away; the chandeliers were shrouded in big holland bags; the shutters were put up; and the spurious Schröder ancestors scowled



dimly from the wall over a great desert of dining-table, no longer shining with snowy damask or sparkling silver and glass. The staff of servants,—the French cook and the Italian confectioner; the ponderous butler, so frequently mistaken by Mrs. Schröder's West-end friends for a City magnate; the solemn footman, large-whiskered, large-calved, ambrosial, and most offensive; the lady's-maid and the buttons,—all, down to the kitchen-maid, who lived in a perpetual state of grease and dripping, and who was preparing herself for "plain cook, good," in the *Times* column of 'Want Places,'—all went away into what the said kitchen-maid was heard to designate "that rubbifying country;" and an old woman, weird, puffy, dusty, with old black silk stitched about her head where her hair should have been, and with bits of beard sticking on her chin, came and took up her abode in the house-keeper's room and "kep' 'ouse" herself.

But when October was well set in, and the days grew short, and the showers not unfrequent; when, even if there were no showers, the heavy mists of morn and dews of night left the ground

moist and dank and plappy; when weird night-winds rose and sighed Banshee-like over the hushed fields; when the lawn lost its soft verdure and grew brown and corrugated; when the trees, which during the summer had so picturesquely fringed the lawn and framed the distance, now gaunt and dismal, swayed mournfully to and fro, drearily rattling their stripped limbs,—then a general inclination to return back to the comfort of London began to be manifested by all the inhabitants of Uplands. It was all very pleasant when Mr. Schröder had spun his chestnuts up the leafy lanes, or over the breezy hills, in the summer; but it was a very different thing when he had to come the same road from town in a close carriage, with the rain pattering against the windows, and with no gas for the last three miles of the journey. It was dull work for Mrs. Schröder and whatever female companion she might happen to have, with nothing to do but yawn over novels, or listlessly thrum the piano, or watch the gardeners filling their high barrows with dead leaves, and unceasingly sweeping the lawns and paths. She

could have relieved her tedium by a little shopping, she thought; but there were no shops—at least what she called shops—within miles of Uplands. As to the servants, they all hated the place; there were no military for the females, and the policemen were all mounted patrols, who “just looked round at night on ’orseback, and never had no time for a gossip, or a bit of supper, or anythink friendly:” while the male domestics were removed from their clubs and all the other delights which a town-life afforded. So, to the great joy of all, the word was given to march; and the whole establishment descended on Saxe-Coburg Square, leaving Uplands to the care of the Scotch gardener, who removed his wife and family up from one of the lodges, and encamped in the kitchen and adjacent rooms.

Mrs. Schröder was by no means ill-pleased at the return to town. The moving gave her no trouble; she had merely to walk into her rooms and find every thing arranged for her; and she was in hopes that a salutary change would be effected in at least one arrangement which was

beginning to worry her. The truth is, that during the last weeks of their stay at Uplands it had begun to dawn upon Mrs. Schröder that Charles Beresford's attentions were not what they should be. She had more than once endeavoured to think out the subject; but her intellects were none of the brightest, and she got frightened, and either began to cry, or let every thing go by the board in the grand certainty that "it would be all right in the end." But of late she had felt the necessity of taking some steps to bring the acquaintance between her and her admirer to some proper footing. This had not come on her entirely of her own accord. She had noticed that her husband (whose attentions to her increased day by day from the time when his heart seemed to soften so suddenly and so strangely towards her) seemed to regard the presence of the Commissioner with obvious impatience. Mr. Schröder never, indeed, said any thing to his wife on the subject; but he evidently chafed when Beresford was in the house; and if Mrs. Schröder and Beresford were at all thrown together apart from the general

company, they were sure to see Mr. Schröder's eyes fixed upon them. Others of her friends had not been so reticent. Captain Lyster had hinted once or twice, what Barbara Churchill had several times roundly spoken out—that Beresford was a *vaurien*, whose attentions were compromising to any married woman; and that if he had the smallest spark of gentlemanly feeling in him, he would desist from paying them. So Mrs. Schröder, who was nothing but a very silly weak little woman (there are few women who are really bad, even among those who have erred: the Messalinas and the Lady Macbeths are very exceptional cases), and who really had a sincere affection for her husband, had made up her mind that she was behaving badly, and had determined to break gradually, but uncompromisingly, with Mr. Beresford and his attentions. She had been so completely hoodwinked by the fraternal relations which, at Mr. Simnel's suggestion, the Commissioner had cultivated, that it was not until immediately previous to their quitting Uplands that she saw the danger she had been running, and felt horribly

incensed with Mr. Beresford for his part in the affair.

They had been back for some days in Saxe-Coburg Square, and Alice Schröder was nestling in her easy-chair after luncheon, wondering when the opportunity would occur in which she could plainly point out to Mr. Beresford that he must altogether alter his conduct for the future, when Mrs. Churchill was announced, and Barbara entered the room.


She was very pale, walked very erect, and held out her two hands to Alice as she advanced.

"Why, Barbara! Barbara darling!" said impulsive little Alice, "I'm so delighted to—why, what's the matter, dear? how strange and odd you look!"

"I want you to have me here for a few days, Alice, if you will."

"Why, of course, dear! I'm so glad you've come at last; it wasn't for the want of asking, you know. And Mr. Churchill will be here to dinner, dear, at seven, eh?"

"Mr. Churchill will not come at all, Alice," said Barbara very gravely. "I am here alone."



"But he knows you've come here, doesn't he?"

"You don't understand me yet, Alice. I have left my husband."

"Left your husband! oh, Barbara, how dreadful! how could you!" and Alice Schröder's face exhibited such signs of unmistakable terror, that for the first time the magnitude of the step she had taken, and the apparent impossibility of its recall, seemed to flash upon Barbara. A rush of tears blinded her eyes; and she held out her hands appealingly, as she said, "You—you don't shrink from me, Alice?"

Astonishment, nothing more, had caused Mrs. Schröder's trepidation; in an instant she had rushed forward and wound her arms round Barbara's neck, saying, "Shrink from you, my darling? why, what madness to suppose such a thing! Where should you come to but to my house, in such a case? Besides, it's nothing, darling, I suspect, but a temporary little foolish quarrel. Mr. Churchill will be here to dinner, and take you home with him afterwards."

But Barbara shook her head and burst into

tears, saying that it was a matter which admitted of no compromise and no amicable settlement. And then, between floods of crying, she told Alice the outline of the quarrel; dwelling specially upon Frank's refusal to give up the letter he had received, or to say who was his correspondent. Alice seemed deeply impressed with the atrocity of Frank's conduct, though she doubted whether she herself would have had the courage to take such a decided step as leaving her home ("You always said I was wanting in spirit, Barbara; and indeed I should not have known where to go to"). She recollected Barbara's having been upset at a letter which had come to Frank at Bissett, before they were engaged; and she was full of "O my's!" and general wonderment, as to who could have written both these mysterious epistles.

"Very odd," she said—"very odd, and very unpleasant. You're sure it was a woman's hand, dear? People do make such mistakes about that sometimes. Most dreadful, indeed! Well, that's one blessing, I've often thought, with Gustav, and is some compensation for his grayness

and his being so much older, and that sort of thing. For grayness is better than jealousy; isn't it, dear? and I'm sure it's pleasanter to think of your husband at whist than waltzing, as some of them do—whirling about the room as though there were no such thing as the marriage service! And letters too, that's awful! I'm so glad you came here, Barbara darling; and so will Gustav be, when he comes in. We must tell him all about it. I tell him every thing now, he is so kind."


He was *very* kind, this heavy-headed elderly German merchant. When he came in, his wife at once told him what had occurred; and when he met Barbara in the drawing-room, before dinner, he took her hands in both of his, and pressed his lips gravely on her forehead, and bade her welcome, and told her to consider his house as her home. For Mr. Schröder had, in his strange old-fashioned way, a very keen sense of honour and of the respect due to women; and he felt, from the story that had been told to him, that Barbara's feelings had to a certain extent been outraged. He had never held much good opinion of the

literary craft: he could not understand a calling which did not employ clerks and keep ledgers and day-books, which did not minister to any absolute requirement, and which only represented something visionary and fanciful. He shared in a very widespread notion that the *morale* of people engaged in that and similar pursuits was specially liable to deterioration; and he took what he understood to be Frank Churchill's defection from the paths of propriety as an indorsement of his idea, and a proof that he had been right in its adoption. He happened to let fall some remark to this effect, a few words only, and not strongly or savagely put, but they had immense weight with Barbara Churchill.

For they immediately recalled to her recollection her several interviews with her aunt, Miss Lexden, when she first announced the engagement with Frank, and she remembered the acrimony with which the old lady had spoken of the class to which her intended husband belonged. The very words her aunt had used were ringing in her ears. "If I were to see you with broken

health, with broken spirits, ill-used, deserted—as is likely enough, for I know these people,—I would not lift one finger to help you after your degradation of me!” “For I know these people!” Too well she knew them, it appears, when she predicated what had actually occurred. Not deserted, though; that at least could never be cast in her teeth. It was she who had taken the initiative;—she who had broken the bonds and—what could the world say to that? Would it not denounce her conduct as strange, unwomanly, and unwifely? And if it did, what did she care? Her pride, her spirit, had often been spoken of; and she felt in no way ashamed of having permitted herself to be swayed by them in this great trial of her life. There must be many who would thoroughly understand her conduct, and sympathise with her; and even if there were none, she had the courage and the determination to stand alone. That she must to a great extent have right on her side—that what she had done could not be looked upon as extravagant or unjustifiable—was proved, she argued to herself, by the kind

reception she had met with at the hands of Mr. Schröder, a man who, as she judged from all she had heard and seen of him, would not be likely lightly to pass over any breach of decorum. How or where the rest of her life was to be passed engrossed very little of her attention at first. She knew that there was no chance of reconciliation with her aunt; nor did she wish it. She had quarrelled with her husband, certainly, and would never be induced to live with him again; but her cheek flushed when she remembered what insults had been heaped upon Frank by her aunt; and she thought almost tenderly of him as she decided that after these insults nothing would induce her to humiliate herself to Miss Lexden's caprices. The thought of writing to Sir Marmaduke Wentworth crossed her mind; but Alice Schröder had told her that Sir Marmaduke was laid up with a dangerous illness in the Pyrenees; it would be very inopportune to worry him, then, with domestic dissensions; and moreover Barbara was in very great doubt as to whether the old gentleman, were he able, would not take an active part in



promoting a peace, and whether he would not strongly disapprove of, and openly condemn, the course she had taken. He had a very high opinion of Frank Churchill, who was his godson; and unless it could be distinctly proved that he had committed himself—unless it could be distinctly proved—could it? what proof was there? had not her pride and spirit involved her in a snare? how could she make her case good before an unbiassed judge? There was the letter, and the letter in the same handwriting which he had received at Bissett; but she had no actual proofs that they were not such as should have been sent to any properly-conducted man. Great Heaven, if she had been too precipitate! if she had brought about an *exposé* by rashness and wretched jealousy; if she had wrongly suspected that kind and generous soul, and cruelly stabbed him without hearing his defence! As Barbara turned these matters in her mind, sitting in her bedroom on the first night of her arrival in Saxe-Coburg Square, she felt the whole current of her being setting towards Frank; and she covered with her

tears and kisses his miniature which hung in a locket at her watch-chain. Must this be the end of it? could her fatal folly—if folly it were—darken the rest of her life? Oh, no! she could never acknowledge her error,—that would be impossible; her pride would never permit her to take the first steps towards a reconciliation: but Frank would come—she knew it; he would come and ask her to return; and she would go; and the rest of their life should be unclouded happiness.

But Frank did not come; and the next morning when Barbara found the hours wearing very slowly by, and no solution of her wretchedness arrived at; when little Alice Schröder's well-meant chatter—well-meant, intended to be consolatory, but still chatter after all—had utterly failed in giving the smallest consolation; when Captain Lyster had called, and having been properly prepared by Mrs. Schröder before he saw Barbara, had evidently the greatest difficulty in assuming ignorance and unconcern; when the day had worn on, and no progress had been made by her in any one way,—the bitter spirit rose in her

more strongly than ever, and she felt more and more impressed as to the righteousness of her cause. The fact that Frank had not come to her, crying "peccavi," and imploring her to return, had, to a very great extent, convinced her that he must have been grievously in the wrong. Fully prepared not merely to forgive him what he had not done, but to be generous enough to meet him half way in an advance which ought to have been made by her alone, she was annoyed beyond description at his making no sign; and each hour that passed over her head strengthened her obstinacy and deepened her misery.

So several days went by. Barbara resolutely refused to go out; nothing could induce her to be seen in public, and none were admitted to the house save the intimate male friends of the family. Barbara stipulated, at once, that no women should be let in, and Alice, who believed in the most marvellous degree in Barbara, agreed to it. She did, indeed, suggest one female name, the name of a lady in whom she was sure, she said, Barbara would find great comfort; but Bar-

bara, who had some acquaintance with the person in question, hissed out, "Cat!" with such ferocity, that little Alice never dared again to open the question. The men-friends were restricted to two or three, among whom Barbara was glad, for Alice's sake, to find Captain Lyster, and equally glad not to find Mr. Beresford. She remembered Lyster's confidence to her at Uplands (she had reason to remember it, she thought with bitterness), and that confidence, though accidentally distressing to herself, had impressed her with a high notion of the Captain's truth and honour. She felt as though she would have liked to have talked to him about her own troubles; but she did not know how to start the subject, and Lyster never gave her the smallest chance.

On the fourth day after Barbara's arrival, Mrs. Schröder asked her guest, as usual, if she would drive out after luncheon, and having received the usual negative, declared that she could not stand it any longer, but that air she must have. Barbara would excuse her? Of course Barbara would; nothing she liked so much as

being left alone. Then Mrs. Schröder determined on riding, and ordered her horse and groom round to the door, and went out for a ride.

She thought she would go for a stretch round the suburban lanes; it was better and more fitted for an unaccompanied lady than the Park. So turning in at Queen's Gate, she skirted the Row, and riding over the Serpentine bridge turned up towards Westbourne Terrace, at the end of which, leisurely riding along, she saw Mr. Beresford. He saw her too, and in an instant was at her side; sitting his horse to perfection, and bowing with perfect ease and grace. He asked her where she was riding, and begged to be allowed to accompany her. She had a refusal on the tip of her tongue; then recollected that she might never have another chance of speaking to him as frankly and decidedly as she had made up her mind to speak. So she consented. During the ride, she spoke earnestly and well; Beresford tried sophistry and special pleading; but they had little chance with her, so thoroughly in earnest was she. It was while in the height of his argument that

they passed the lodge-gates of The Den, and were seen by Kate Mellon.

Mrs. Schröder rode home that evening in a happier frame of mind than she had been in for months. She felt that she had effectually settled all Mr. Beresford's pretensions, and that she might meet her husband without the smallest shadow on her brow. Her joy was a little dashed by the receipt of a letter from her husband, which was put into her hand as she alighted from her horse. It said that an Egyptian prince, with whom the house had large transactions, had arrived at Southampton, and that he, Gustav, as representing the house, was compelled to go down and do the honours to him; that he had telegraphed to his brother to relieve him as soon as possible; and that he hoped to be back the next day.

Mrs. Schröder's hopes were realised. In the course of the next afternoon a cab drove up to the door in Saxe-Coburg Square, and Mr. Schröder descended from it. His wife, who had rushed to the balcony at the sound of wheels, noticed

that his step was slow, and that—a thing she had never seen him do before—he lent upon the cabman's arm. When he entered the room she rushed to him, and, embracing him, asked him how he was.

"I am well, my darling," he answered; "quite well, but that I have rheumatism, or something like it. A curious pain—dead, dull, stupid pain—in my left arm and shoulder. Rheumatism, of course! And you, Barbara, my dear; you are well? That's right; no news with you, of course? Ah! I have been thinking much about you in the train, and we will talk to-morrow of your affairs. Well, Alice, what news? Did you persuade Barbara to drive yesterday?"

"No, she refused again; so I went out on horseback."

"Ah, ah! that was right. Alone?"

"I went alone; but I met Mr. Beresford."

"Beresford! I hate that name; he is a bad man. Bad! bad!"

And Mr. Schröder shook his hand in the air, and was obviously very much excited.

"Gustav," said Mrs. Schröder, "I'm very sorry that—"

"Ah, you don't know! More of this Beresford another time. A bad man, my dear! Now I must look through my letters. Dinner at seven, eh?"

And, with a bow, Mr. Schröder descended to his library.

The clock had struck seven, the gong had boomed through the house, and Alice and Barbara were standing at the dining-table; the place at the head being vacant.

"You had better tell your master, Pilkington," said Mrs. Schröder to the great butler; "he is probably in his dressing-room."

The great butler condescended to inform his mistress that he did not think his master had left the library.

Mrs. Schröder then bade him find his master, and tell him they were waiting dinner.

The butler left the room, and the next moment came running back, with a face whiter

than his own neckcloth. Barbara saw him ere he had crossed the threshold; in an instant she saw that something had happened; and motioning the butler to precede her, walked to the library, followed by Mrs. Schröder.

Fallen prone on his face, across the library-table, lay Mr. Schröder, dead, with an open letter rustling between his stiffening fingers.

CHAPTER III.

HALF-REVEALED.

As Kate Mellon had soliloquised, some time had elapsed since Mr. Simnel had visited The Den. A wary general, Mr. Simnel; a man who, like the elephant, never put his foot forward without first carefully feeling the ground in front of him, and trying whether it would bear; a man who, above all, never was in a hurry. He had not gone through life cautiously and with his eyes wide open without remarking how frequently a little impulse, a little over-excitement or yielding to headstrong urging, had led to direful results.

“No hurry” was one of his choicest maxims: to sleep upon an idea; to let information just received mellow in his mind until he saw the very best way to utilise it; to brood over the most promising projects, carefully sifting the chaff from

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the grain; to wait patiently until the two or three shadowy alternatives had, after due inspection, resolved themselves into one broad path, impossible to be shrunk from—that was Mr. Simmel's way of doing business. He never allowed the iron to be overheated. So soon as it was malleable, he struck—struck with irresistible force and sure aim; but he never dallied with the half-heated metal, or tried warpings with pincers, or blind struggles with solid resistance. If he had a fault in his worldly dealings, it was that he delighted in hiding the power which he was able to wield, even beyond the legitimate time for its manifestation. There are men, you will have observed, who, in playing whist and other games of chance and skill,—long-headed calculators, far-seers, sticklers for every point of Hoyle,—yet cannot resist the temptation of withholding their ace until the best time for its production is long past, solely for the sake of causing a sensation, for the sake of creating a feeling of astonishment among their fellow-players that the great card has been all that time in hand. So

it was, to a certain extent, with Robert Simnel.

He had known nothing of love, this man, during his youth. He had had no time for the cultivation of any tender passion. He had been brought up roughly, with his own way to make, with his own living to get. He was not pretty to look at, and no ladies felt an interest in smoothing his hair or patting his cheeks. The matron at the Combeardingham grammar-school,—a sour blighted old maid, a poor sad old creature, who yet retained some reminiscences of hope in her forlorn frame; in whom head-washing, and looking after linen, had not obliterated all traces of feminine weakness, and who remembered early days, when she dreamed that some day some one might make her some kind of a marriage offer, dreams which had never been fulfilled,—this weird sister had her favourites among the boys; but Simnel was not of them. They were mostly fat-headed, sleek-faced boys, apply, rubicund, red-lipped, and shiny; boys with reminiscences of home, who kissed Miss Wardroper as a kind of bad substitute

for Ma, and who traded on their blowing beauty to be let off easily on tub-night, and to have advances of pocket-money before the regular day. Robert Simmel had no share in these pettings; he was what Miss Wardroper considered an "uncomfortable lad;" he was "nothing to look at;" and preferred lying on his stomach under trees with a book between his elbows, on which his face was resting, or sitting bolt upright, trying to catch on his page the glimmer from the school-fire, to all the cosettings of the housekeeper's room. In immediate after-life his course of conduct was pretty much the same. Combcardingham was not a moral town. Many of the pretty girls who worked hard all day dressed in great finery in the evenings, and proceeded to the theatre, to the gardens, to the *al-fresco* entertainments with which the suburbs of the town were studded, attended by the youth of the place. The conveyancing-clerk of Messrs. Banner and Blair, the Common-law ditto, and the Chancery manager, were accustomed to speak of Annie, and Emmy, and Fanny, as though the establishment of those eminent lawyers had been

the Hôtel-Dieu, and they the interlocutors had been Parisian students instead of provincial lawyers; the very copying-clerk, who served writs, and fetched beer for the gentlemen in the inner office, had been seen to wink his eye, and heard to mention some such article as "a bit of muslin." But Robert Simnel had remained adamant. They dared not chaff him; there was something in his manner which forbade any approach to familiarity. Some of the ribalds had once set some of their female friends to get a rise out of the quiet studious shame-faced young man; but the girls had been met with perfect politeness, mixed with such studied coldness, that the game was given up in despair. From that time until he came up to London, Simnel was left unworried.

His life in town was equally cold and celibate. He moved very little in the female society of his own class; not that he was unwelcome, but that he disliked it. It bored him; and that was the worst thing that could happen to him when once his foot was fairly set on the ladder. In the old days he had endured men, women, parties, society,—all

utterly repugnant to his feelings and tastes; and he had vowed that, should he ever have the power, the severance of such obligatory ties would be the first luxury in which he would indulge; and he kept his word. "My lady," would chirp little Sir Hickory Maddox,—“my lady has bid me bring you this note of invitation to dine with us next Wednesday, Simnel. Formal, you perceive; for you are such a well-known stickler for formalities, that we fain must treat you à la Grandison;” and then Sir Hickory, who prided himself on the construction of his sentences, would double up his little head into his ample cravat, and bow in a mock heroic manner. But Mr. Simnel managed to find an excuse for not attending the solemn dinners of his chief; nor did he ever attend the pleasant *réunions* of Mrs. Gillotson and Mrs. Franks, wives of the senior officers of his department, to which he was bidden. Of course, as a bachelor, it was not supposed that he should receive lady visitors; and though his rooms in Piccadilly had witnessed certain scenes which their proprietor described as *petits soupers*, but which

the mother-in-law of the serious saddler who held the shop below openly proclaimed as "orgies," at which certain distinguished *coryphées* of Her Majesty's Theatre were present, and there was lots of fun and laughter and champagne, and an impromptu galop after supper,—no one could tax Simnel with any decided flirtation. He had been very polite to, more than that, very jolly with every body, thoroughly hospitable, genial, and kind; but when they broke up, and Punter Blair put Fanny Douglas into a cab, and Sis Considine walked away with Kate Trafford and her sister Nelly, and the whole party turned out laughing and singing into the street, Robert Simnel went round the rooms and put out the wax-lights, and picked up bits of lobster-shell and cracker-paper from the floor, and yawned confoundedly, and was deuced glad it was over.

So he went on his way through life, with that way unilluminated by one spark of love until he first saw Kate Mellon. How well he recollected every circumstance connected with the first glimpse of her! It was on a glorious spring

afternoon at the beginning of the season ; he was walking with Beresford (with whom he was just beginning to be intimate) through the Row, when he noticed the heads of the promenaders all turned one way ; and following the direction, he saw a mounted female figure coming at a rapid pace down the ride. The horse she sat was a splendid black barb, an impetuous tearing fellow, who had not yet learned that he was not to have his own way in life, and who was making the most desperate struggle to recover such submission as he had been compelled to yield. In and out, in and out, from side to side, he bounded, obedient to the light hand, the scarcely tapping whip and the swerving body of his rider ; but his foam-flecked chest and his sweat-rippled neck showed how unwillingly he accepted his lesson. At length, on catching sight of Beresford, who left Simnel's arm and walked to the rails, Kate drew rein, and, while she gave one hand to her acquaintance, she relaxed the other until the horse had full play for his stretching neck. Simnel stood amazed at her beauty and at the perfect outline of her supple


figure. She was just exactly his style. Mr. Simmel had no admiration for Grecian features or classic mould. Ebon tresses and deep dreamy eyes were little regarded by him; his taste was of the earth, earthy; piquancy of expression, plumpness of form, was what he, to use his own expression, "went in for." He would not have bestowed a second glance upon Barbara Churchill; but Kate Mellon was exactly to his taste. He filled his eyes and his heart with her as she sat talking to Beresford that day; the sweeping lines of her habit, the dainty little handkerchief peeping out of the saddle-pocket, the dogskin gauntlets, the neat chimney-pot hat, the braided hair, the face flushed with exercise,—all these lived vividly in his remembrance, and came in between his eyes and letters for signature to irascible correspondents and long accounts of indebted tax-payers. He was not long in obtaining an introduction to his idol; and then he saw at once, with his innate sharpness, that he had but little chance of pressing his suit. Long before that *éclaircissement* which Beresford had described to him, Simmel saw

the state of affairs in that direction, and knew what Kate Mellon fondly hoped could never be realised. He did not think that the girl ever would have the chance of so plainly stating the position of affairs; but he knew Beresford well enough to be certain that moral cowardice would prevent his availing himself of the position offered to him. Nor did Simnel blame him in this; that farseeing gentleman knew perfectly that for any man in society to ally himself in matrimony to a woman with a reputation which was equivocal simply from her profession, no matter how excellent the individual herself might be, was sheer madness. "It isn't," he argued to himself, "as though I were a landed proprietor or a titled swell, who could throw the ægis of my rank and position over her, and settle the question. Heaps of them have done that; dukes have married actresses of queer names and women of no name at all, and all the past life has been elegantly festooned over with strawberry-leaves. I'm a self-made man, and they hate me for that, though my status is now such that they can't deny it; but then they'd imme-

diately begin to ask questions about my wife; and if there were a chance of flooring us there, we should be done entirely."

So when Mr. Beresford had told the story of his adventure with Kate Mellon, Mr. Simnel, who had very much slacked off the scent, purely from want of encouragement and a chance of seeing his way, returned to the charge with renewed vigour. Beresford had faithfully repeated to his Mentor every word of Kate's wild outburst; and in that sudden revelation Simnel, nothing amazed thereby, had found a strong incentive to further exertion. Kate had hinted at relatives of whom her future husband need not be ashamed. Who were they? That was one of the first points to be found out. He wisely looked upon Charles Beresford as now cleared out of his way. It was not for nothing that Mr. Simnel had read at the Combcardingham grammar-school of the *spretæ injuria formæ*; and he knew that the Commissioner had probably committed himself for ever in the eyes of the lady of The Den. Nevertheless, to make assurance doubly sure, he at once

used all his influence towards turning Beresford's views in another direction; thus further irritating Kate's pride, and preventing any chance of a reconciliation; for this apparently phlegmatic man of business, this calm, calculating, long-headed dry chip of an official, loved the little woman with his whole heart and strength, and determined to miss no opportunity of so winning her regard by his devotion to her cause, and by the tangible results springing therefrom. That must tell in the end, he thought. She is now heart-sore about Beresford; she has discovered the foundation of sand on which her first little castle was built; and now she will not touch the ruins or lay another stone. There is but one way to arouse in her any new life, — the keynote to be touched is ambition. If there be any truth in her assertion that she is sprung from a race of which she can be proud, one may work it through that. So Mr. Simmel worked away. He speedily found that Kate's own knowledge of her origin was cloudy in the extreme; but he possessed, in a rare degree, the faculty of putting two



and two together and making four of them very rapidly; and he had not been very long chewing the cud of poor Kitty's stories of the circus, and the uncle, and all the rest of it, before he saw a clue which sent him spinning far into Northumberland by express-train to a place where he saw the circus which Kate had named was advertised in those wonderful columns of the *Era* as then performing.

No one accompanied Mr. Sinnel on that journey; no one knew what he did or what he heard; but as the chronicler of these mild adventures, I may state that though not in the least astonished at what was—after a free pecuniary disbursement—imparted to him, he came back to London radiant. The clerks in the Tin-tax Office did not know what to make of him; some of the young ones thought he had got married; but at that suggestion the older men shook their heads. That was the last thing, they opined, to cause an access of animal spirits. He might have come in for a legacy, or taken the change out of some body whom he hated; that was all they could see to account

for his cheerfulness. Two or three of the men, Mr. Pringle of course among the number, improved the occasion by asking for a day or two's leave of absence; a request at once granted by the smiling secretary, who, on the day after his return, announced his intention of making a half-holiday, and wound his way towards The Den. He rode through the lodge-gate, and exchanged salutations with the rosy portress; but as he turned into the carriage-drive he perceived Freeman, the old stud-groom, standing at the entrance to the stables, alert and expectant. As soon as the old man recognised Simnel, he advanced towards him, and motioned him towards the farm-yard. Simnel turned his horse's head in that direction, and when he arrived inside the gates and on the straw-ride, old Freeman held his bridle as he dismounted.

"A word wi' you, sir," said the old man, putting his finger on his lip and nodding mysteriously.

Mr. Simnel looked astonished, but said nothing, as the old groom called to a helper, to

whose care he relinquished the horse; then taking Simnel into a little room and planting him in the midst of a grove of girths and stirrups, the saddles of which formed an alcove above him, the old man produced a short set of steps, and motioning to Simnel to seat himself on the top of them, took up his position immediately in front of him, and said, in a voice intended to be low, but in reality very hissing sonorous,—

“Waät be matther?”

It was seldom that Mr. Simnel was nonplussed, but this was beyond him. He had only caught one word, and that he thought better to repeat. So he merely ejaculated “matter?”

“Ay, matther!” echoed the old man, this time in rather an angry tone. “Waät be matther down yon?” jerking his head towards the house. Mr. Simnel thought that the man was presuming on his position to take liberties, a very terrible crime in his eyes, so he simply elevated his thick eyebrows and echoed, “Down yon?”

“Thou knowst waät a mean, sir, weel enow. Waät be matther wi’ my leddy? waät be matther

wi' my bright lassie ai've tended this ever so long?" and the old man's face puckered up into wrinkles, and he produced from his hat a cotton handkerchief with which he rubbed his eyes.

"What do you mean, Freeman? I didn't follow you until this instant. Is—is your mistress ill?" asked Simnel.

"No, not ill; that's to say waät folks call ill; always greetin', that waät she is,—thinkin' of something yon,—givin' no heed to waät goes on close to her face. Eyes lookin' far away out into the distance; no thowt of the stock such as she had; hasn't been into the farrier's shop these three weeks,—blister here, singe there, do as 't loikes; Miss never says nay now, and that's bad sign; for a more thrifty body never stepped."

"Ah, she doesn't take such interest, you mean, in what goes on here as she did."

"Int'rest! She cares nowt aboot it!" said the old man. "Ther' soommut oop, soommut wrang! that's what ther' is. Ther' can't have been no one a philanderin' wi' her, on and off like,—you understand?"

"I should think not," said Mr. Simnel, with a face as solid as a rock.

"If I'd thowt that," said old Freeman, "and I'd found 'em out, I'd beat 'ems brains out as if it were a stoat!" and as he spoke he struck the palm of his hand with the handle of his hunting-whip in an unmistakably vicious manner. "Dunno waät's coom to her to-day," he continued, after a pause; "haven't set eyes on her all the morning. Hasn't been in t'yard, hasn't been in t'stäables, hasn't moved out of t'house."

This latter part of Freeman's speech seemed to arouse Mr. Simnel's fading attention; he looked up sharply, and said,

"Not been out of the house all the morning! what does that mean? Who was here yesterday?"

"Yesterday," said the old man slowly considering; "there were Sandcrack coom oop about Telegram's navicular,—no more navicular than I am; nowt but a sprain,—and Wallis from Wethers's wi' a pair o' job grays; and old Mr. Isaacson as tried some pheayton 'osses; and—"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Simnel; "no young man; no one in the habit of coming here?"

"Not one," said Freeman.

"That's devilish odd," said Mr. Simnel, half to himself; "what the deuce has happened to upset her? I'll go in and see. Good day, Freeman; I've brought some good news for your mistress, and I hope we shall soon see her herself again."

The old man touched his hat, as Simnel walked off to the house, where he found Kate's servant, and learnt from her that her mistress had kept her room all the morning, complaining of headache. From this domestic Mr. Simnel had a repetition of old Freeman's story. Not only had she seemingly lost all interest in her business, which formerly so thoroughly engrossed her attention, but for the last few months she had been in every respect a thoroughly changed woman.

"I've been with her four year," said the woman, holding her hands clasped in front of her, and beating time with them at the conclu-

sion of each sentence; "four year I've been with her, and never see no megrims. A cheerfuller lighter-hearted lady there were not, so long as you was quick. Every thing must be done directly minute, and all was right. But latterly there's been nothink but megrims and lowness of sperrits, and no caring for what we wears or what we eats, or whether we eats at all, indeed." This and much more to the same effect, only cut short by Simnel's requesting the woman to take his name to her mistress, and say he was anxious for a few words with her.

He sat down in the dining-room and took up a *Bell's Life* which lay on the table; but had hardly glanced at it when the door was hurriedly thrown open and Kate entered. She was perfectly colourless and trembled violently. As she gave her cold hand to Simnel, she asked at once,

"What's the matter, Simnel? what's brought you here? Something particular to say, they tell me. What is it?"

Though Mr. Simnel was in reality very much shocked at the change which had taken place in

her personal appearance, he did not betray it by look or word. There was not a break in his voice as, retaining her hand between his, he said,

“Why, Kate, is this your hospitality? is this the way you receive visitors, demanding their business in this pistol-to-the-head fashion? Suppose I were to say that my pressing business was to look at and to talk to you.”

“No, no, Simmel; no nonsense. At least not now, please; as much as you like when you’ve answered me. There hasn’t been a—I mean he hasn’t—you haven’t—confound it, Simmel, why don’t you help me!” and she stamped her foot upon the floor in rage.

“Kate, Kate,” said he, still quietly, though this little evidence of her excited state touched him very deeply, “I can’t tell what is the matter with you to-day. I’ve come to talk to you and to tell you a little news about yourself—that’s all.”

“About myself? not about—I mean about no one else? Nothing has happened? nothing—”

“Nothing that I know of. I only arrived in

town late last night, and I have seen no one this morning. What on earth did you expect? Now you're flushing again! My dear Kate, you're not well, child; you must—"

"I'm all right now," said she, withdrawing her hand; "I'm all right again. It was only some stupid nonsense; I'm a bit nervous, I think. I'll have some change of air, and see what that will do. I'm as nervous as a cat. Had a girl here for a lesson yesterday. Fine girl, sister of Dick Hamilton's—Dirty Dick's, you know; and she wanted to see me put her horse at the brook. The brute refused, and I couldn't put him at it the second time—lost my pluck—funked it myself—fancy that! First time such a thing ever happened to me!"

"You want change and rest, Kitty," said Simnel, kindly. "And you want rest of mind much more than mere respite from bodily fatigue. Your life lately has been past in a series of storms, in which you have been tossed about, and whirled here and there, in a manner which is now beginning to tell upon you. Now, all these starts and

flushes and tremors to-day are the result of some fresh worry. What happened yesterday?"

"Happened yesterday?" echoed Kate, flushing deeply as she spoke; "nothing."

"Who was here?" asked Simnel, in a mild tone of voice, but fixing his eyes full on her.

"Here? who? How dare you question me in this way? Who are you to come worming and prying into my affairs? I never asked you to come, and I sha'n't be sorry how soon you go!"

He was not an atom moved at this outburst of rage, at these taunts; at least he did not appear so. He only shook his head, and said sorrowfully,

"Unfair, Kitty; horribly unfair. I've just come back from a journey of hundreds of miles, undertaken for the object of what you are pleased to term 'worming and prying into your affairs;' and this is all the thanks I get."

She seized his hand, and pressed it warmly. "There, there! forget it: it's all part and parcel of my nervousness, that I was telling you about.

Now you shall know who was here yesterday. Beyond the usual business-people, only one man—Scadgers the money-lender.”

“Scadgers! The deuce he was! What brought him? Did he come to—no, that’s impossible. What did bring him?”

“Now it’s you that are muttering to yourself, Simmel,” said Kate. “Make your mind easy; a letter from me brought him here. I wanted a little assistance.”

“Stuff, Kitty! What on earth—oh, I see now. You little flat! you’ve been paying young Prescott’s bills for him.”

“Well, what if I have? You don’t mind.”

“Mind! not I. I love you better for it. Oh, I see you smile; but I’ve been making a few inquiries at the Office since I was here last, and I find that it is a case with your pupil and him. He’s a fine young fellow, and will do well.” It is astonishing how, when we are no longer jealous of a man, his good qualities crop out.

“He *is* a good fellow; a thoroughly good fellow; a gentleman in every thought,” said Kate;

“and it was only right to give him a clean start again. All young men—all who are worth any thing—kick up their heels at first; and then some fools pull them in tight, and they get sulky and vicious, and never run straight afterwards. But if they’re held straight in hand, and have just enough rein given them, they right themselves very soon, and go as square as a die. You’ll see now that James Prescott will marry, and settle down into a regular humdrum life, and be as happy as the day. That’s the only existence, Simnel. Lord help us! They talk of the pleasures of excitement,—the miserable fools, if they only knew!” and Kate heaved a deep sigh, and buried her face in her hands.

“Come, come, Kitty,” said Simnel, “this will never do. Nothing that you’ve said can reasonably be applied to your own case. You’ve had the enjoyment of one style of life, and now let us hope the joys of the other are rapidly coming upon you. You shake your head again. What on earth is the matter with you, child?”

“I can’t tell, Simnel,” said the girl, raising her

tear-blurred face. "I can't tell. I've a horrible weight here," placing her hand upon her heart,—"a something hanging over me; a presentiment of something about to happen,—and I haven't the least notion what,—that never leaves me. I'm as flat as a bad bottle of champagne. By the way, I think I'll try whether a glass of that Madeira wouldn't—"

"No, no, Kitty; for heaven's sake keep off that! The lift given by that is only temporary, and you're twice as down as you were before, when it subsides. You've never asked me one word about my journey yet."

"Your journey! What journey? Oh, to be sure, you said you'd been away, and on my business. Where did you go to?"

"To Newcastle-on-Tyne. To Norton's Fields, just beyond the town; where—"

"Norton's Fields! Newcastle! Why that's where we used to make our pitch with old Fox's Circus, and—"

"And that's exactly the place where old Fox's Circus is pitched at this moment."

“Did you go to it?”

“Why, Kitty, can’t you understand that, after what you told me the other day, to visit it, and glean information from its people, was the sole cause of my journey?”

“And did you see them all? Is old Fox still alive; and Madam, with her deep voice and big bony hands; and Lucette and Josephine—big girls now, and doing the *haute-école* business, I suppose; and Brownini, the clown, is he with them yet? and Thompson the barebacked-rider, —a conceited beast, he was!—and old Bellars the band-leader? Lord, Lord! what happy times those were! happier than I shall ever see again, I know.”

“Nonsense, Kate. Your life is just now at its turn. All those horrid days of grinding labour in the circus, all the hard work you’ve done here, shall be to you like a dream. You shall be a swell, and hold your own with the best of them. Ay, and not merely in money,—I offered you that long since,—but I wanted to prove a position for you, and I *have* proved

it Kitty, my darling!" and Mr. Simnel's usually pale cheeks glowed, and his eyes glistened, and he squeezed Kate's hand in the excitement of his feelings.

"You've found out whose child I am, Simnel?" asked Kate.

"Every thing! I've only got to see your father, and wring from him the confession,—and I have the means of doing that, as safe as houses, —and you shall be put in you proper position at once, Kitty, and a capital position it is, too. Your father is a man of great wealth, very highly thought of, moving in the best circles, and eminently respectable."

"And his name?"

"Ah, that I mustn't tell you till next time we meet. It's due to him to let him know how much we have learned, and to give him the option of behaving properly. If he refuse, I can put such a screw on him as will compel him at once to do as we wish. And then, Kitty," continued Simnel, dropping his voice, and looking at her fondly from under his bushy eyebrows, "when all my work

for you is satisfactorily finished, I shall come to you and ask for my reward."

"You shall have it, Robert," she said simply, placing her hand in his. It was the first time she had called him by his Christian name, and as he heard it a thrill of delight ran through him.

Mr. Simnel had ridden away homeward, and Kate had thrown herself on a sofa in the dining-room, and was vacantly watching the purple gloom creeping up and engulfing the landscape. Vacantly, I say; for though her eyes were fixed on it, she heeded it not. Simnel's description of his visit had awakened in her a thousand memories of old days. The smell of the stables, the tan, and the sawdust of the ring; the lamps, and the orange-peel in the marquee; the way in which the tent-poles would strain and crack in a high wind, and the audience would look up, as though expecting the crazy edifice to descend on their heads; the swinging naphtha-burners flaring in the draught; the dull flopping sound of the first drops of a thunder-shower on the tent roof, caus-

ing an immediate consternation and whispering among the non-umbrellaed spectators,—all these rose before her mind. She recollected all the different stages of her own novitiate; heard old Fox's thin piping voice cursing her freely for "missing her tip" in clearing the garters, or sticking in the silver-papered hoop; and his wife's hoarse growling at her extravagance in tarlatan skirts and rose-pinked stockings. Then, pursuing this train of thought, she remembered what Simnel had said about her parentage; and stung with a sudden idea she sat upright on the sofa, unconsciously tapping her teeth with her nails. Could it not all be made straight? That was what she thought. Her father was a man of position, a man highly thought of and esteemed—so Simnel had said; he could be forced to recognise her as his daughter,—Simnel swore he should do this. What, then, stood in the way of her being reconciled to, of her being married to Charles Beresford? She had plenty of money as it was, and if her father were rich as stated, could have the command of more. It was her

position, the horse-breaking business, that had floored Charley; she saw that at once; but now here she was a recognised swell, bar the illegitimacy; and Charley wouldn't mind that with money, and above all with love—oh, such love!—for him. He would give up every one else for her; he would give up that fair-haired woman.—Ah, good God! the letter! that fatal letter, which she wrote in her mad passion of yesterday! that wild wicked letter was fatal! it would be shown to him; her handwriting would be recognised, and there would be an end to all her hopes.

When the servant came in with the dinner-tray she found her mistress in a swoon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.

DEAD! had been dead for half an hour!—so said the first man with an approach to medical knowledge who was called in, and who indeed was a worthy chemist who lived in the neighbourhood, and who, on the strength of a square shop fitted with an oil-cloth floor, with a little fountain in the centre (in the basin of which half-a-dozen bottles of aërated water were always cooling), of a counter bearing glazed cases of scents and cosmetics, of a nest of drawers labelled with illegible half-words, and of three large shining coloured bottles in the window, was regarded by the servants in the vicinity as a weird practitioner indeed. A servant had been despatched in a cab for Dr. Prater; but in the interval pending that luminary's arrival, Mr. Canthar, of the Medical Hall, was master of the position, and all those who were

left with the body hung upon his words. It—it had already come to be called ‘it’—still lay in the library, where it had been found. Mrs. Schröder, who had hurried in close behind Barbara, had at the very first glimpse of the state of affairs gone off into a violent fit of hysterics, and had been removed to her room, whither Barbara had followed her, and where the latter was now in close attendance upon her stricken friend. When Mr. Canthar arrived (he had stripped off his black-calico apron and thrown it into the cork-drawer on being summoned, and completed his toilette *en route* by running his fingers through such hair as remained on the sides of his head), he found Mr. Schröder’s body stretched out on the sofa in the library, and attended solely by the kitchen-maid and by a page-boy, who, partly from love to the kitchen-maid, partly from gratitude to his employers, bore her company. The other servants had declined having any thing to do with such horrors, as not coming within their engagements. The great butler had retired to the housekeeper’s room, taking with him a bottle of

brown sherry, and there these supreme functionaries sat, discussing future prospects; the French cook had gone out to announce to a friend of his, who was steward at a crack club, that he was now open to an engagement; the two footmen, great hulking masses of ignorance and vanity, with faces whiter than the powder on their heads, sat in the pantry shaking over one glass of hot gin-and-water, and solemnly glozing over the probability of a suggestion made by one of them that "he" (they had never named him) had died of "spuntanus kymbustium." When Mr. Canthar's sharp ring came at the bell, they both trembled violently, and went up together to open the door. The announcement that their master was dead,—an announcement made by Mr. Canthar after a very cursory examination,—utterly failed in reassuring them; on the contrary, it produced the liveliest symptoms of fright, and they incontinently hurried down stairs to the pantry again. Mr. Canthar required but a very short examination to arrive at his verdict. He placed his finger on the pulse, his ear to the

waistcoat; then he took a candle from the attendant kitchen-maid, and looked for an instant into the half-closed glazed eyes. Gently depositing the hand, he said, "Dead! quite dead! been dead for half-an-hour, I suppose. I'm not called upon to state my opinion of the cause of death; indeed, to you it would be quite useless; and as no member of the family has done me the honour to be present,—well, no matter, never mind." Then, in a whisper, "I'd put a cloth round the jaws, don't you know? just bind it together, because—ugly appearance, you understand, Martha — good-night;" and Mr. Canthar tripped out of the house, and devoted the remainder of the evening to working out a composition for the nutriment of the hair, which, under the name of Canthar's Crinibus, has an enormous circulation over the infant heads of Albertopolis.

Half-an-hour after he had received the message from the servant who had been despatched for him, Dr. Prater spun up in his little low carriage,—hung on C springs to prevent the doctor's highly sensitive organisation being disturbed by

bumps or jolts over the horrible pavement,—and drawn by a pair of little bays, which might have been the property of any *millionaire* in the land. The great butler condescended to leave the society of the housekeeper, and to rouse himself so far as to hold open the drawing-room door for the doctor's entrance; also to produce a decanter and a couple of glasses; and placing them at the doctor's elbow, to croak out, "Our '20, sir!" and to fill a wine-glass.

"Ah, thank ye, Pilkington," said the little doctor, taking up the glass, and holding it between his eye and the candle; "this is a dreadful thing, Pilkington."

"Yes, sir," said the butler, shortly; "it's inconvenient. Do you find the wine agreeable to your taste, sir?"

"Yes, yes, thank ye. I want you now to show me—ah, here's some one coming;" and the door opened, and Barbara Churchill entered the room.

"Mrs. Schröder is very ill, doctor; you must see her before you go, if you please; in her absence I will conduct you. Pilkington—oh, there

are lights, I suppose?—this way, doctor;” and she led the way to the library.

This had been Barbara’s first experience of death, and it was a severe trial for her, broken down as she was with her other miseries; but she saw how utterly helpless poor little Alice Schröder was, and she determined to help to bear the misery of her sudden misfortune. So she preceded Dr. Prater to the library; and when she had opened the door, she beckoned to the kitchenmaid and page-boy, who were sitting bolt upright on the edge of their chairs, and let the doctor enter by himself, she returning to the dining-room. In a very few minutes she was joined by the little doctor, who had in the passage composed his face to its usual aspect by this time. “Not the slightest hope, my dear madam,—not the slightest hope. If I had been here the minute after, I could not have been of the least assistance. Must have been instantaneous, my dear madam,—instantaneous,—disease of the heart,—under which I long knew he laboured; but I never told him. What was the need? I’ve said to myself fifty times, ‘Prater,

you should tell Mr. Schröder of his danger:’ and then, again, I’ve said to myself, ‘What’s the use? Mr. Schröder’s not a man to relax those gigantic enterprises in which he is engaged, on the mere word of a theorist like myself. He’ll only be annoyed at my interference.’ There was no cause for any excitement, any special excitement, my dear miss? Pardon me; to whom have I the pleasure of speaking?”

“I am Mrs. Churchill,—I was Miss Lexden, —a very intimate friend of Mrs. Schröder’s before her marriage.”

“Ay, ay, ay! of course! how very remiss of me not to bear it in mind! Pleasure of including your husband, Mrs. Churchill, among my distinguished literary friends. I hope he’s quite himself. Ay, ay; Miss Lexden that was, eh? Think I’ve had the pleasure of meeting you, before you took rank as a matron, in the house of my dear old friend Sir Marmaduke Wentworth? Ah! I thought so. Ill now, poor dear fellow,—ill in the Pyrenees; hum, ha! And no cause for any special excitement in the present lamentable

case, you say, my dear Mrs. Churchill?—hum! Well, well; death from natural causes, of course. I can testify as to his heart-disease. Still, I'm afraid, my dear madam, there'll have to be a horrible—what we call a *post-mortem*. The ridiculous laws of this country are not satisfied with a professional man's word in such cases, and though—of course I'll take care there's no annoyance. Bad thing for Mrs. Schröder,—very! I'll go up and see her directly. By the way, my dear Mrs. Churchill," added the little doctor, edging himself very close to Barbara, and looking more than ever like an owl; "here's a paper which I picked off the floor of the library when I went in to see our poor late friend just now. I haven't looked at it myself, of course; but perhaps it might be well to put it away, and not to let Mrs. Schröder see it just yet; and," continued the doctor, examining with great attention the pattern of the Turkey carpet, "I don't see that there's any necessity to mention its existence before the coroner's people,—no one else seems to have seen it,—and these things are better kept quiet;" and the doctor handed Bar-

bara a folded paper, which she at once placed in her pocket, and bowed himself out.

Then there fell upon that house confusion, and silence, and sadness, and a general mistiness and ignorance. No one spoke above their breath; no one knew what day of the month it was, or what day of the week, or what length of time had elapsed since the occurrence of the event which had given rise to this state of affairs. All normal laws were suspended; the *carte* for the proposed dinner did not go up as usual in the morning; the great butler suspended his customary inspection of the plate and reviews of the china and glass; the young lady really born in Picardy, but passing current as a Parisian, who was called "Mumzell" by the other servants, and who was attached as special retainer to Mrs. Schröder, had no interviews with her lady on toilet subjects, and found her health undoubtedly improved by being relieved from mental anxiety on the subject of the perpetual invention of new styles of head-dress. The tradesmen seemed to take Mr. Schröder's dying out of the season as a kind of personal affront.

Had it happened when every thing was in full swing, the poulterer had remarked, and when parties had the greatest worrit in supplying what parties ordered, why parties might have been glad of a lull ; but now, in the slack time of year, when there was few families in town, and what was mostly supplied with game from friends as had shooting, to have a large and reg'lar customer's orders suddenly stopped, as might be said, in this way, was not what parties expected and might be said to look for. Perhaps the retainers attached to the stable-department took the pleasantest view of matters. It were a bad business, they allowed ; but, after all, there must be money left, and the establishment wouldn't be broke up ; and besides, a missis were easier to serve than a master, and couldn't pry ; not that any thing of that sort could be said of their late guv'nor, for a more innocenter man never breathed. He were a bad whip, always a tuggin' at the 'orses' mouths ; but a good master. Meanwhile 'orses must be kep' exercised ; and so Mrs. Edwards the coachman's wife, and Nancy and Billy her young 'uns, and Susan Gilbert,

what was keeping company with Strapper the under-coachman, and one or two convivial friends, had two or three very pleasant days at Richmond and Hampton, proceeding thither in what they called a "weggynet," borrowed from the corn-chandler at the corner of the mews, and drawn now by the chestnuts which Mr. Schröder used to spin along in his mail-phaeton, now by the iron-grays which concentrated attention on Mrs. Schröder's equipage in the ring. And in every department of the servants' hall and in the outlying regions connected therewith, there seemed to be an impression of the over-weening necessity for going in for good eating and drinking, as if to counteract the baleful effect of the calamity which had occurred. In the house itself, the kitchenmaid, relieved from attendance in that dread library, gave herself up to the cooking of mighty joints for discussion at the "one-o'clock dinner." The housekeeper and the great butler had little refectations, washed down with brown sherry, in the still-room; while one of the two-gallon stone jars of brown brandy,—originally ordered for preserve-purposes, and of a very

different quality from the eau-de-vie-de-cognac in the tapering bottles—was apportioned by the butler to the nightly grog of the servants' hall. Then it was that Rawbert, one of the six-foot Johns, and son of an Oxford scout, first showed his remarkable talent for brewing punch; under the influence of which the assemblage grew so jolly, that some of them were only restrained from breaking into harmony by the representation of others as to what was lying upstairs.

What was lying upstairs had been moved from the library to a spare bedroom, had been handed over to the charge of such horrible ghoulish women as only appear at such dread times, and had been left all placid and composed and cold and statuesque by itself. What was lying upstairs had had visitors. The coroner—a fat man with a red face, smeared black clothes, beady black eyes, and boots slit here and there as a necessary accommodation for gout—had visited it, had stood at the head of the bed where it lay, and, had it not been for thick carpeting and double-doors, would have sent his opinion of it clanging to the ears of her whom

it once cherished as its own heart's blood. The jury had visited it (some of them at least, nearly half were too frightened to come beyond the bedroom-door), and had said, "Oh!" and "Deary me!" and had looked at the coroner and gone away again to the Coburg Arms; and then and there, over hot brandy-and-water, administered as a corrective, and strongly recommended by the coroner, had found a verdict of "Death from natural causes." Then it had other visitors—men in black, who took off their coats at the door and left their boots outside, putting on list slippers, and who had foot-rules, and who whistled to themselves softly as they went about their ghastly work. These men came again at night with others, blundering up the stairs under the weight of a horrible burden, and the room assumed a different aspect, and what lay therein seemed further removed from humanity and less kin to any thing it had hitherto claimed kinship with. And after that, it had yet another visitor; a white-robed woman, who stole in at night and knelt at the side of its black prison-house, and implored pardon for past waywardness and thought-

lessness and girlish follies, and prayed for strength and succour and support ; then rising, pressed her lips on its cold forehead, and was led from the room in a half-hysterical state.

Yes ; Alice Schröder had begun to wake to the realities of life, to find that opera-boxes and drums and sealskin-cloaks and equipages and money, all good things in their way, were powerless against Death ; and that Death was not merely the bug-bear which he had been always painted, but had other qualities horrific in their nature, which she at least had never imputed to him. He was a thought-compeller, and up to that time little Alice had never known what thinking was. But now she thought long and earnestly. She thought of her earlier days, long before she had received her father's orders as to her marriage ; she thought of her school-girl flirtations and hopes and fears and intentions as to matrimony ; recalling the cavalry cornet, the light-whiskered curate, and the Italian singing-master vividly in her memory. Then she had a vague recollection of her coming-out and her town-life, through all which there loomed a

shadowy presentment of Captain Lyster, standing specially boldly out in her remembrance of her stay at Bissett Grange; and then came Mr. Townshend's imperative decision, and her acceptance of her dead husband's offer. Had she behaved well to that dead husband, who had behaved so kindly to her? Ah, how painfully, as though with an actual sting, came back the recollection of his kindness, of his lavish generosity; how with clumsy action and ill-chosen words, but showing in the highest degree the warmth of his affection and the delicacy of his mind, he had loaded her with gifts, and had endeavoured to forestall her every wish! How, with an evident struggle,—for had he not been matured to it from his youth up?—yet successfully, he had weaned himself from the cares of business (at one time his greatest pleasure), and learnt a new life in the society of his wife, and in manifesting his devotion to her. Had she brought him such wealth of affection as he had showered upon her? Had she even met him half-way? When she was a girl, she was fond of being considered

“highly romantic” by her companions; she thought herself the essence of romance; and yet what was her romance compared to that shown by that elderly gray-headed German merchant, who had changed the whole tenor of his life for a woman’s love? And had he possessed that love? that was the bitterest question of all. Respect, yes; honour, yes; but did she respect Mr. Beresford,—she certainly did not honour him,—who had so often been her companion during her husband’s lifetime? had she not had a warmer feeling towards that accomplished cavalier? had she not permitted him to speak in somewhat slighting terms, to which she by her silence had given tacit approval, of the dead man; ridiculing his age and habits, unfitting him for finding favour in ladies’ eyes, and protesting against the hard fate which cast such pearls before such swine? All this came up clear and fresh in Alice Schröder’s memory; and as it rose she hated Beresford with all her strength; and, struck with deepest remorse, wished—oh, how she wished!—that the time would come over again, that she

might dower her husband with her love, and show how she appreciated his devotion to her.

Then what was lying there lay there no longer. There came a morning when the boys in the neighbouring mews, who had been on the look-out for some little time, passed the word to each other that it was all right for that day, and forthwith coming trooping out, took up their positions in available spots close by. The mutes in their preposterous scarves, and bearing their hideous banners, mounted guard at the door; and the hearse and the mourning-coaches pulled up close by; and the red-nosed men got ready the trays of feathers, and the long staves, and the velvet trappings, and all the funeral insignia, which would be ridiculous were they not disgusting. And the company arrived at the house: there were two of the dead man's brothers, representing the firm respectively in Hamburg and Paris; uncles and cousins, pillars of the London Exchange; the clerk from the office, who had acted as the dead man's private secretary, and who was a very presentable young man, the delight of the

evening-party-givers of Surbiton; Mr. M'Quiddit from Bedford Row, who was met on the door-step by his clerk, who presented him with an oblong packet, which the lawyer deposited in the library before joining the rest of the company; and little Dr. Prater, looking preternaturally solemn and wise,—all these gathered together to see Gustav Schröder to his grave. On the dining-room table were cold fowls (already cut up, and tied together with pieces of black crape) and cold viands; but save Mr. M'Quiddit, who had come up from his country-house at Datchet and was hungry, no one tasted food. The decanters, however, were put into requisition; and the great butler took occasion to whisper in Dr. Prater's ear a recommendation of some *Vino di Pasta* as being something special. Then came that most horrid time of all, when there was a bumping and a scuffling on the stairs, and a creaking of the bannisters. Every body knew what caused it and what it meant; and there was an involuntary silence which made the talk, when they began again to talk, seem more hollow and forced than it had been before. Then,

draped in silk scarves, and wearing hats swaddled in crape, the mourners ascended the coaches, walking to them through a lane of boys, and were borne off to Kensal Green; on alighting at the gates of which dismal necropolis, they were marshalled into proper order by the head undertaker, and so marched in procession to the grave. There a gentleman, who really could not be complained of when it was remembered that he had done duty four times already that day, and expected to do it three times again, half drawled, half cantered through the most beautiful service of the Church, that for the burial of the dead, without the smallest atom of expression, and apparently without knowing what he was about; then he shut his book, and the bystanders one by one looked into the grave—and all was over. The mourning-coaches, which had come so slowly, went merrily back; the Schröders went to the City house, and sent telegrams and read share-lists, and talked of how soon Gustav's share in the concern ought to be realised; the uncles and cousins did much the same; the presentable clerk had a holiday, and

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met a few lady friends at the Zoological Gardens ; Dr. Prater lunched at a rich patient's, where he told the story of Mr. Schröder's death, and dined at another rich patient's, where he told it again ; and Mr. M'Quiddit had an interview with the widow and gave her a short abstract of the will, which was eminently satisfactory.

It had been proposed by the deceased gentleman's brothers, who were his executors, that the widow should leave town for a few weeks,—should run down to Brighton or Tunbridge Wells,—and thus, in change of scene, shake off the excess of grief under which they found her to be really labouring. But under a strange state of feeling which is scarcely describable, but which originated in an idea that her determination to do her duty to the utmost would not be properly carried out, were she to allow herself any thing like indulgence, poor little Alice decided upon stopping in Saxe-Coburg Square and thenceforward entering upon the useful state of life which she had proposed to herself. Perhaps in this decision she was a little

guided by her feeling for Barbara: the regard which had always existed between them (regard on Barbara's side mingled with a sense of superiority leading to pity, the regard which a grand Scotch deerhound might feel for a little thin-limbed Italian greyhound pet) had very much increased since the recent calamity. Alice had experienced a sisterly tenderness at Barbara's hands which she had never thought Barbara capable of feeling; Barbara had seen in Alice a fixed propriety of purpose such as she had never given Alice credit for. And Alice was by no means so selfish or so thoroughly wrapped up in her own grief as not to see that, although Barbara pretended to look upon her own married career as entirely at an end, yet in reality she had by no means given up all hope of a happy reconciliation with Frank. A sudden peal at the bell would make her cheek flame; her nervousness at the sight of Pilkington entering the room with letters was unmistakable; and in a thousand other ways she gave evidence of her heart's yearnings. So Alice felt that while this unsettled state of

affairs lasted, Barbara's home must be with her, and that a removal from town would be highly antagonistic to any chance of a settlement which might transpire; and as this entirely coincided with her own views, she elected to remain in town.

Mr. Schröder's will had been made a few months before his death, and was in accordance with the general tenor of his married life. It ordered that his share in the City firm should be realised at the earliest favourable opportunity, and that it and all his other investments should be lodged in the name of trustees for his wife's use and disposal. As this represented a very large annual income, and as the details of the will soon became public through the medium of the press, the "kind-inquiries" cards began to shower down in Saxe-Coburg Square. You, who are rich, find these amicable condolences sent in at once, in such times. You, who are poor, know that in general there is a little hanging fire until it is understood what will be the future position of the family. In the present day the vast propor-

tion of middle-class people occupy a factitious position in society; factitious, that is to say, thus far—that its existence depends entirely on the life of the father, husband, bread-winner. So long as his good income is made, so good; but when he dies, despite all his attempts at laying-by, his precautions in insuring his life, the whole thing changes; all the little luxuries have to be given up and the family sinks into a decidedly lower circle of society. That is why the great law-giver Society waits to hear the will read before he nods approval on visits of condolence being paid. In this case there could be not much doubt about money; but there were some peculiar features,—“a sudden death, my dear, and that sort of thing;” and it was thought better by Mrs. Grundy, and her set, to wait a little, until there could be no possible doubt on the matter. After a little time, the intimates of the house were admitted. Old Mr. Townshend was still away on the Continent; and there never seemed to have been any other member of the Townshend family; but the Schröders came down in flocks. The wives of the bro-

thers, and the sisters, and the daughters' nieces, and cousins twice removed,—who so kind as they in time of trouble? Their husbands and fathers might be money-grubbers in the City of London; in them was nothing but the good old German spirit of kindness, of brotherhood and sisterhood, of honest help and open-handed affection, which had first flourished when they were all poor strugglers in the Frankfort Judengasse, which had lasted until they were among the most opulent of the earth. And Dr. Prater was there, of course, every day, chirruping softly about the house, and going from thence up and down and into the ends of the London world, and talking of the enormous wealth left by his poor deceased friend Mr. Schröder to his interesting patient Mrs. Schröder. And Captain Lyster came, sending up his card, and proffering his services in any manner in which they might be required; and then Barbara saw him; and after a little time Alice saw him; and his services were brought into requisition, and proved to be eminently useful. For when Fred Lyster chose to shake off his drawl,

and to apply himself, there were few men with a quicker or a keener appreciation of what ought to be; and in settling affairs, there were numerous cases arose in which a lady could not possibly interfere, and in which the intervention of some one prompt, clear-headed, and business-like, was indispensable. And as Fred Lyster had never any thing to do, he had full leisure to attend to these matters, and entered into them with an eagerness and a perseverance which astonished all who saw him—save Barbara, who perhaps might have made a shrewd guess as to the mainspring of his actions. Poor George Pringle had called too. He had been a good deal cut up by the death of Mr. Schröder, whom he had been accustomed to describe as “a good old cock, sir; a worthy old party; kind-hearted and all that, and giving no end good feeds;” and he had, in his rough way, great sympathy for his cousin Alice,—“a poor little thing, sir; left alone, with nothing to console her.”

With consolation-end in view, Mr. Pringle arrived one Sunday afternoon at the door of the house in Saxe-Coburg Square, in a hansom cab,

whence he extracted a smooth English white terrier, with a black patch over one eye. Taking this animal under his arm, he, after making due inquiries after Mrs. Schröder's health, transferred it to the frightened grasp of Pilkington, requesting that it might be at once carried up-stairs with his love. Pilkington was horribly frightened,—he “never could abide dawgs;” and so no sooner was the door closed than he set the animal down in the hall, where, catching sight of the well-fed calves of Rawbert the footman, it presently began to lick its lips, and growled in a very ominous manner.

Mr. Beresford called three times: once immediately after the announcement of the death, when he simply left his card; once on the day after the funeral, when, besides his card, he left a warm message of inquiry; once a fortnight after, when “he hoped he might be permitted to see Mrs. Schröder.” Barbara was with Alice in her boudoir when this message arrived; and she noticed that the poor little woman went deadly white as she listened, and then flushed deeply.

"Oh, no, no!" she exclaimed; "I cannot see him. Barbara darling, I never will see him again. I hate the mention of his name; it jars upon me now; I cannot tell you how—oh, no, no!" And so Barbara framed a polite reply in Alice's name, and Mr. Beresford went away.

That night, as Barbara sat in her own room, feeling very weary and worn, and with an irrepressible yearning towards her husband and her home, the tears rose in her eyes; and, determined not to indulge in the luxury of "a good cry," she drew out her handkerchief, and with it a paper, which fell to the ground at her feet. Looking down at it as it lay there, she recognised the paper which had been found in the library, and handed to her by Dr. Prater, on the night of Mr. Schröder's death, and which had ever since entirely escaped her recollection. She picked it up from the carpet, and opened it; but no sooner had her eyes fallen on the inside than she gave a start of astonishment, and uttered a low cry. The same!—unquestionably the same handwriting! The circumstances connected with both previous occa-

sions of her having seen it far too deeply impressed it on her mind to allow of her being mistaken. It was that long scrawly handwriting—unmistakably that of a woman only partially educated—in which the letters to Frank Churchill—that delivered at Bissett, and the envelope found in the dressing-room—had both been addressed. If Barbara's heart beat fast when her eyes first fell upon the lines, how much more disturbed was she when she read their contents, as follows :

“Your wife is false to you, and is carrying on with a Mr. Beresford. They meet every day, ride together, and deceive you. Watch them, and you will find this out. It has been going on for some time—for months. It is a thing that Beresford has meant for a long time; and he always carries out what he means. I know him well.

“A FRIEND.”

It was, then, the receipt of this letter which had had such fatal effect on poor Mr. Schröder. He had fallen, pierced to the heart by this anonymous

stab. Any excitement, any worry, or anxiety, coming suddenly on him, might have ended his life at any time, Dr. Prater had said; and so— Dr. Prater? It was he who had picked up this paper from the library-floor, on to which it had fallen from the dead man's hand. The doctor had asked her whether there had been any cause for sudden excitement; had suggested that the paper should not be shown to Mrs. Schröder; that its existence need not be mentioned before the corner. He had read it, then. Barbara had no need to think twice to assure herself on that point. That the imputations on Alice which the anonymous letter conveyed were unfounded, Barbara had not the smallest doubt. She knew that her friend, though thoughtless, had never, even in thought, been guilty; and knew that she now bitterly repented her levity and silliness. It would be worse than cruel to let her know of the existence of this document; it must be kept from her at all hazards. Alice's horror of Mr. Beresford was now so great as to require no fanning; and Barbara was certain that of her own free will the

widow would never see him again. But in the event of Mr. Beresford's demanding an interview, what was to be done then? Poor Barbara found it impossible to answer this self-proposed question; and there was no one to whom she could apply for advice. Captain Lyster had been her mainstay in several cases; but this was a delicate matter, which it was impossible to make him acquainted with. Oh, if she only had Frank to turn to! and that sent her thoughts reverting to the handwriting. Whose could it be?—who could be the owner of that fatal *griffe*, which seemed to bring desolation with it wherever it arrived? And at the end of her reverie, finding herself no clearer in her suspicions than she was at first, Barbara locked the note into her desk, and determined to leave to chance the use she might eventually make of it.

CHAPTER V.

ET TU BRUTE!

ON the morning succeeding the day on which Mr. Schröder died, Mr. Simnel sat in his room in the Tin-Tax Office, deep in a reverie. The newspaper lay on the floor at his feet; he was slowly rubbing the knee from which it had just fallen, and his other hand supported his chin. The news had come upon him suddenly; and he was calmly thinking to what results the occurrence might tend. Had he been at his club the night before, he would have heard the whisper which, thanks to Dr. Prater, was then permeating the West End; but on his return from Kate Mellon's, Mr. Simnel had quietly dined in his own rooms, and there remained for the rest of the evening, arranging his plans. Thus the first intimation which he had received of the event was from the columns of the

newspaper then lying at his feet; in which a paragraph headed "Sudden death of a City-merchant" had speedily claimed his attention. Matters of weighty importance had Mr. Simnel to filter through his mind in the course of that reverie. He was a worldly-minded man, but by no means a bad man at heart; and the fact of the rich man's death at that particular time struck him as specially touching and softening. The newspaper described the anguish of the dead man's widow as "inexpressible;" and though Simnel, from his experience, was not inclined to lay much stress on the exactness of that statement, yet he felt that in all probability the little woman of whom he had heard so much, would probably be very much distressed. From all he had learned, he believed that of late the relations between her and her husband had been very much deepened and strengthened. He guessed somewhat of this from the fact that Beresford had been more than infrequent and shy in his allusions to that *ménage*, and to the pursuit he was engaged in in that quarter. Beresford? By Jove! then his chance was come much sooner

than either of them had anticipated ! the great obstacle was removed, and he had the course clear before him. No, not exactly clear ; the manner of her husband's death, the suddenness of it, would create a great revulsion in Mrs. Schröder's mind, and greatly imperil Mr. Beresford's chances, however strong they might be. Whether they were strong or not was a matter of doubt in Mr. Simnel's mind ; he had a great contempt for Beresford's word, knowing him to be possessed of a happy inability to speak truth ; and sometimes he doubted whether his colleague had really made any play worth mentioning at the house in Saxe-Coburg Square. Then Mr. Simnel began rubbing his knee more violently than ever, as he thought that the whole affair from first to last was very disreputable, and one which redounded to the credit of no one engaged in it. Would it not be better to drop Mr. Beresford altogether, and leave him to fight his own way in the matter ? It certainly would be more honourable and satisfactory in every way ; but then—why then, if Mr. Beresford did not marry some rich woman (and Mrs. Schröder

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der was his best chance), he would go to the dogs ; and then what would become of his, Simnel's, eight hundred and twenty-five pounds ? Worse still, if Beresford did not succeed with Mrs. Schröder, he might suddenly veer round, and on the impulse of the moment, and under the pressure of creditors, go up and declare for Kate Mellon's hand. And Simnel was by no means certain that that young woman would decline such an offer, even after all that had occurred ; on the contrary, being naturally suspicious, and on the present occasion jealous and in love, the thought sent such a twinge through him, that he shrugged his shoulders, and made up his mind that things must take their course.

As he sat there rubbing his leg much more calmly after arriving at this determination, the door opened, and Mr. Beresford entered the room. He nodded airily, and, pointing to the newspaper on the floor, said, " You've seen it, of course ? That chattering doctor-fellow was right, you see. What do you think of it ? "

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"Of it? of what? of Mr. Schröder's death, do you mean? I think it a very sad thing."

"The devil you do!" said Mr. Beresford with a sneering laugh; "the door's shut, Simnel; don't you think you'd better drop that innocence when you and I are alone together?"

He was a cur, this man, and instinctively a cad; he had been as miserable as possible for weeks; but he thought he saw the breaking-up of the dark clouds now, and immediately began to swagger and hector on the strength of it.

"Be good enough to understand, Mr. Beresford, that that is language which I don't permit *any body* to use to me!" said Simnel, through his shut teeth and with a very white face; "I repeat that I think Mr. Schröder's death a very sad thing. Why do you choose to sneer when I say so?"

"No, no, not sneer: hang it, old fellow! you take one up so infernally sharp. Bad thing, of course it is, for him, poor devil; but good thing for me; and as you know rather more of me than you did of him, I fancied I should have had your congratulations."

"Oh, I see," said Simnel; "you fancy you ought to have received my congratulations: on what, may I ask?"

"Look here, Simnel!" said Beresford, turning savagely round; "drop this infernal nonsense; it doesn't do here, and it's ill-timed. Don't come the *non-mi-ricordo* business, after having been arch-conspirator and suggested every thing. Plainly, the death of this unfortunate man is in my favour, because he was the principal obstacle in my way to the success of our scheme; and he is removed."

"Well; looking at it in that way—"

"In that way! in what other way would you look at it? It's in a remarkably £ *s. d.* kind of way that it presents itself to me, I can tell you. I don't mind mentioning now, Simnel, what I shouldn't have let on otherwise; that I'm tremendously dipped; in for—ay, I daresay, three thousand more than you know any thing about; and here's the chance come just in the nick of time."

"Where did you get in for this? and where did you get the money?"

"Get in for it? Doncaster, the Cæsarewitch, the Cambridgeshire! each infernal thing went to the bad. I stood a cracker on the first; then tried a pull through with the other two; and was all wrong with the lot. Scadgers, Parkinson, and a new man, Barnett, of Stamford Street, over the water, did the advances; but I should have looked very blue if this hadn't come off, I can tell you."

"You're a little sanguine, are you not? It *hasn't* come off yet, has it?"

"What a wet blanket you are, Simnel! No, of course not. Indeed there's been a strong element of virtue and duty, and all that sort of thing, introduced of late. But now there's no necessity for that. The actual fancy and liking always existed, I flatter myself; and now all that can be indulged in without the slightest suspicion of vice."

"To be sure, to be sure," muttered Mr. Simnel, ruminating; "you'll have to proceed very cautiously; but that you'll of course understand." Mr. Beresford, by this time half way to the door, nodded his head and went out.

Some few days afterwards Mr. Simnel was again honoured by a visit in his room from the Commissioner. The latter gentleman looked worn and tired; he threw himself into a chair and began beating his boot with his cane, and seemed altogether out of sorts. Mr. Simnel noticed all this, and was tolerably prepared for what was coming. "What's the matter, sir?" he asked quietly; "have you had too many papers to sign; or are you annoyed at having to come down to this plebeian part of town so early as two o'clock; or haven't you had your lunch; or what is it?"

"Don't chaff, Simnel; I'm not in the humour for chaff just now. I'm afraid I'm getting into a hole at last."

"What's the matter now?"

"Oh, these infernal fellows are putting on the screw—lawyer's letters, writs, and all that rascally machinery; and I don't see a chance of staving them off. If I could have said any thing about a rich marriage now—"

"That's exactly what I was coming to. How about Saxe-Coburg Square?"

"Well, fishy, very fishy. I've called there three times; the last time sending in specially and particularly to say that I wanted to speak to her; and still the same answer—compliments—not kind regards, you know—compliments, and utterly unable to see me. No hint of a future opportunity—nothing!"

"That looks badly, certainly. What do you intend to do?"

"Do! Go there again. Have it out, by hook or by crook. By Jove, I will see her! I'll remind her that—"

"Doesn't this strike you as devilish low behaviour? Don't you see that to thrust yourself in where you are evidently not wanted, to break in upon the privacy of a lady, who is in the beginning of her first great sorrow—"

"Oh, drop that, please. Doesn't it strike you that I owe you nearly nine hundred pounds, and other people a great deal more; and that if they're not paid, I shall be arrested and sold up? And don't you see, therefore, that I *must*—No, by Jove! I don't see why I should; you're quite

right; it is an ungentlemanly business, and I'm sick of all this dodging and duffing and forcing myself down the throat of a woman whose liking for me seems to have gone off. But there's one who would still seem to care about me, Simnel, my boy, I'll wager any money; and one whom I've been a fool not to think of before—Kate Mellon!"

"Kate Mellon?" echoed Mr. Simnel with scowling brows.

"Yes, Kate Mellon! She's got ready-money enough to pay off all my ticks and set me square; and then I could keep square. I'm sure she'd forget all that stupid business of which I told you; though I've never seen her since. I could put that right in a minute; and—"

"I don't think it would do," said Mr. Simnel earnestly—"I don't think it would do. Miss Mellon's status in society would be fatal to all your hopes of advancement. Your aunt Lady Lowndes and the bishop would cut you dead; and remember," added he, after a pause, and with an attempt at a smile, very ghastly and gummy and forced, "I am interested in this matter to the extent of

eight hundred pounds, and I don't think it would do. I'm disposed to recommend you to hold to the other, which appears to me to want only a little patience, and—if I understand from you the security of your position—an undoubted declaration to bring to a favourable issue.”

“And what would you advise?”

“A letter. I will draft you what I should suggest; and if you approve, you can copy it, or embody it in any thing else you have to say to Mrs. Schröder;” and Mr. Simmel sat down at once at his desk and began to write. Mr. Beresford sat watching him the while. Not a change in Simmel's face, not an inflexion of his voice, had escaped him; and he wondered what it all meant, and in what Kate Mellon's fortunes could have influence over the impassible secretary of the Tin-Tax Office.

Two days after this interview, Mr. Beresford called in Saxe-Coburg Square and sent up his card, requesting an interview with Mrs. Schröder. The usual message of excuse being returned to

him, he gave the servant a letter which he had brought with him, and begged that the man would take it to his mistress ; he would await the answer. Mrs. Schröder, seated in her boudoir, read the note, seemed greatly disturbed, told the man that she would send an answer downstairs by her maid, and immediately rushed off to the adjacent bedroom, where Barbara Churchill was lamenting all that had happened, and wondering what was to be the end of her life.

“O Barbara, Barbara darling, what shall I do?” exclaimed the poor little woman ; “here is Mr. Beresford come again, and he wanted to see me, and I said *no*, as we had determined, and then he sent me up this dreadful letter ! Oh, what shall I say to him, dear ? oh, do help me, there’s a darling.”

Barbara took the letter from Alice’s shaking hand and read it. It was not a pleasing composition ; it began in an injured tone, and then grew mysterious, and then almost threatening. The writer demanded an interview, and justified his demand by referring to certain bygone circum-

stances which the reader would readily remember ; and the whole tone was sentimentally prurient and offensive and objectionable in the highest degree. Poor little Alice had not seen any thing of this kind in it ; she had merely found it "horrid" and "impertinent ;" but Barbara's cheek flamed as she perused it, and the tone of her voice was rather sharp as she said, "Is the man still here, Alice?"

"What man, dear ? Mr. Beresford?"

"Of course!—is there any other ? Oh, he is here. Very well, then, leave me this letter, and I will go down and speak to him about it?"

"You'll see him, Barbara?"

"Yes," said Barbara, who was already opening her desk and looking for something therein. "It will be the best way. You'll find he won't trouble you any more." She kissed Alice at the door, and walking down stairs and into the drawing-room, confronted Mr. Beresford.

That gentleman was seated near the window with a book of photographs, at which he was not looking, in his hand. He rose as he heard the

door open, and advanced rapidly when he saw the female figure: the room was somewhat darkened by heavy curtains, and he could not clearly make out who it was. When Barbara, stopping, pulled herself to her full height, he stopped, too, disappointed; he expected some one far less majestic.

"You wished to see Mrs. Schröder, I believe, Mr. Beresford," said Barbara, after the first salutation: "I come as her representative."

"I am very sensible of the honour you do me, Mrs. Churchill," replied Beresford; "but I fear that no representative will do. I want to speak to Mrs. Schröder herself."

"That is impossible," said Barbara, calmly.

"Impossible is a very strong word, Mrs. Churchill. I sent Mrs. Schröder a letter—"

"Oh, yes, here it is; it is about this letter that I have come to you. You'll sit, Mr. Beresford, please; for this is likely to be a prolonged talk. Now you know that I am Mrs. Schröder's oldest and most intimate friend, and as such I am deputed to answer this letter."

"Pardon me, I have no grounds for believing the latter part—"

"Except my word; and you won't doubt that? No! I thought not! Now, Mr. Beresford, I am about to speak very plainly to you, always relying on you as a gentleman. Mrs. Schröder is very young, and rather thoughtless and not too much gifted with brains. Since you have been acquainted with her, both before and after marriage, you have paid her small attentions, such as no woman dislikes. They were attentions such as the rigidly-censorious might shake their heads at; but which no woman, knowing her own rectitude and conscious of the proper understanding existing between her husband and herself, need have been afraid of. But the case is altered now! Poor Alice is unfortunately in the position of having no husband as her guide and safeguard, and—these attentions must cease!"

"You speak as Mrs. Schröder's mouthpiece, Mrs. Churchill?"

"Precisely! In this letter which I have here, there is a tone which I am sure you did not intend

to convey; but about which it is my duty to speak to you plainly. Under present circumstances Mrs. Schröder feels it necessary to limit her knowledge of you to that of the merest acquaintance. There is no other footing on which you can know each other. If you were not what I know you to be, a gentleman, I should point out that there is not, nor ever has been, any thing between you which could lead you to any other supposition—no letters, no any thing which ill-natured persons could lay hold of—you follow me?"

"Ye-es, ye-es!" said Beresford, feeling that he was outwitted.

"That is right—so, as you are a gentleman, I don't mind telling you the urgent necessity for the adoption of this course. Notwithstanding the absence of any such evidence as I have spoken of, the world has chosen to talk."

"Ah, ah!" said Mr. Beresford, with a smile of returning satisfaction.

"Yes, in its usual base and unfounded manner. Here is an anonymous letter which was addressed to the late Mr. Schröder."

"Let me look at it !" said Beresford, eagerly.

"It is here ;" and Barbara handed to him the paper picked off the library-floor by Dr. Prater.

Mr. Beresford took the letter from her hand. The instant his eye fell on the handwriting, Barbara, who was looking at him steadfastly, saw his colour change and his hand shake. But he read it through without saying a word, and returned it to her with a bow.

"You will see now, Mr. Beresford, the utter impossibility of Mrs. Schröder's permitting her acquaintance with you to continue," said Barbara. "You will see that the note which you addressed to her can have no answer but that which I have already given you ; and that henceforth, as a gentleman, you are bound in honour not to—"


"Of course ! of course !" replied Beresford ; "it is of the other letter I am thinking now." And he set his teeth and struck his ungloved hand violently with his cane. "You have introduced a new element into the discussion, Mrs. Churchill, and you must pardon me if I close it here. What my future course may be, circumstances must de-

termine : I make no promise, as I make no threats; but—”

“We will close the discussion at once, sir, if you please!” said Barbara, haughtily.

“At once,” said Beresford, with a bow. “Believe me that the advocacy of that anonymous person—whose handwriting I recognise—though useful perhaps, as time may prove—is by no means flattering.”

He bowed again and left the room. “By no means flattering!” echoed Barbara after he had gone; “it is, then, as I suspected, some horrible wretch who has cast this shadow over my life!”



CHAPTER VI.

BALTHAZAR.

MR. SIMNEL sat calmly over his breakfast in his rooms in Piccadilly, little dreaming of all that had occurred on the previous day in Saxe-Coburg Square. He skimmed the newspaper; he dallied with his toast; he laid down his knife and fork and paused in his meal, smiling to himself with the air of a man who had reason for self-gratulation. Such reason had Mr. Simnel. He had fought a very long and arduous and up-hill fight—a fight in which the odds were all against him, and which he had won entirely by patience and excellent generalship. And now the difficulties were surmounted; the land lay straight before him; and he was just about to clutch the prize which, with so much trouble, he had won. “You shall have it, Robert!” those were the last words which she had said to him; words which haunted his

memory, which he found himself repeating over and over again. The woman he had loved so long and so quietly, who at one time appeared far beyond the power of his grasp, had succumbed; he had won her honestly, and by his own tact and perseverance; and she would be his own! There would be a bar sinister in her escutcheon, but what of that? Against herself, against the propriety of her conduct, no one had ever dared to drop a hint. Her father should make such a settlement on her as, coupled with his own money, would relieve her from the necessity of pursuing her then occupation, of doing any thing but play her part as mistress of her house, and enjoy herself. What a fool was Beresford!—ah, that opened up a fresh vein of thought! He had said yesterday that, failing in his pursuit of Mrs. Schröder, he should fall back on Kate Mellon, and try and patch up that severed alliance. Simnel's heart beat loudly as this recurred to his mind; he knew how deep had been the attachment which Kate had formed for Beresford, and he was not sure that she would not be even yet willing to listen

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to proposals of peace. She must not have the chance—that was what he determined; and he rang his bell hurriedly, and sat biting his nails until it was answered.

“You saw Mr. Scadgers?” he demanded of his servant.

“Yes, sir; he will be at your office at one o’clock.”

“Good; now go over at once to Austin Friars to Mr. Townshend’s office. Tell the head clerk,” said he, taking a telegraphic despatch from his pocket, “that his master will arrive at London Bridge at half-past one, and that he must send some one to meet him. Say that I shall be with Mr. Townshend at three sharp. You understand?” The valet answered in the affirmative and left the room, returning in a few minutes and ushering in Mr. Beresford. That gentleman looked any thing but happy; his face was of a dull leaden hue, his eyes were dull and red-rimmed, and the tell-tale muscles of his mouth were working visibly. He flung himself into a chair, and as soon as the door closed, said: “Here’s a devil of a go!”

"What's the matter, man?" asked Simnel. "Look here—you're all out of sorts—lips going and hands shaking—just steady yourself before you speak. Here!" and he unlocked a side-board and placed a liqueur-stand before his friend.

"That's better!" said Beresford, draining a wine-glass of brandy. "I am all wrong, and enough to make me! Thought I'd catch you here before you went down to work. I've no end to tell you—"

"Tell on!" said Mr. Simnel; and so encouraged, Beresford narrated every thing that had occurred between him and Barbara the preceding day, respecting the anonymous letter and the conversation that had ensued thereanent, word for word.

As Mr. Simnel listened his heart sunk within him, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he prevented himself from displaying his emotion. He succeeded, however, so admirably, that though the colour of his face might have gone a shade or two paler, not a muscle in it moved, and when

Beresford stopped, he said without a tremor in his voice, "What do you intend to do?"

"To do!" screamed Beresford—"well, upon my soul, Simmel, you are a wonderful man! I tell you this tremendous story, which, for heartless villany, beats any thing I ever heard—and done by a woman too!—and all you ask is, what I intend to do! Do!—I intend to punish that she-devil, cost what it may! to—"

"Steady, sir! you're using strong language—"

"Oh! what! Kate Mellon, I mean; not Mrs. Schröder—my mind's made up with regard to her! I shall—"

"Look here, Beresford; did you come here to rave and storm before me, or to ask my advice?—which?"

"I don't know what the deuce you mean by raving and storming! You'd do the same if you'd been treated in this way by a—there, never mind, I'll take your advice if—"

"If it agrees with your own plans! generous creature! Now look here; you're in a horrible state of rage and fever in which you can do no good.



My advice to you is, to go away straight at once. Go out of town somewhere for a fortnight, and then come back and see how the land lies."

"And so lose every chance I've got! No, thank ye. You know all that business yesterday was Mrs. Churchill, not Mrs. Schröder. I don't believe the widow knows a word about that cursed letter; and there may be a chance of getting over her yet, though that Churchill woman is as deep as the Whissendine. She and I always hated each other, I think, and I don't intend to let her beat me now; no! I've sent a line to Mrs. Schröder marked private, without any flummery of former days, or any thing of that sort,—simply begging her to meet me in the Row this afternoon, and give me five minutes' talk. If she does that, I think I can put matters square; and if not—"

"And if not?"

"Well, if not, by George, Simnel, up goes the sponge, and no mistake. There are three writs out against me, and I fancy some of Sloman's people are on. There have been some fellows hanging about my door in South Audley Street;

and I fancy, from what Stephens says, they were any thing but the right sort. What are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking," said Mr. Simnel slowly, "that if this Schröder business does not come off, —and I don't think it will,—you'd better send in a certificate from Prater or some one, and get away to the Continent for six months."

"Well, we'll wait and see what to-day brings forth, at all events. If it don't do, I'll very likely take your advice."

After Mr. Beresford had gone, Mr. Simnel sat with his feet on the fender, slowly rubbing his knee. "It must be hurried through at once," he said to himself. "I'll square the settlement to-day; and if Beresford fails with Mrs. Schröder, he must be got out of town and abroad. Vengeance, eh? no, not quite that, my fine fellow. Long before you come back, there'll be somebody with a right to interfere, if any thing like vengeance is threatened."

And how fared it with Kate Mellon all this

while? what had happened to the pivot on which so many schemes of love and hate, of worship and revenge, were turning? In a bad way was Kate Mellon, mentally and thence physically. The news of Mr. Schröder's death, which she had read accidentally in an "odds and ends" column of a cheap sporting-paper, had come upon her with a terrific shock. She had compared dates, and found that it had happened on the day after the despatch of her letter; and though there was nothing to create any connexion between the circumstances, she felt a kind of horrible impression that by her act she had hastened his end. This preyed upon her mind; and as she had no one in whom to confide—(had Simnel come up in the interval, it is probable that she would have told him all, for the sake of getting a scrap of consolation, of advice—of mere talk—so weightily did the retention of the secret lie on her),—she fretted and worried herself, and each day grew more feverish, more unsettled, more discontented. One horrible thought she had, which swallowed up all the rest—might not she unconsciously have helped

her rival to her happiness! If this fair-haired woman cared for Charley, as had been stated (and as she had seen with her own eyes), she could not have cared for her husband. He was now removed, and there was nothing to prevent a marriage between them. Here was a phantom which nothing could lay; a spectre which would haunt her day and night, ever mocking and gibing at her; and she tossed in ceaseless torture, and grew paler and thinner, and took less interest in her business every day.

On the day on which Mr. Beresford and Mr. Simmel had the conversation just narrated, Kate Mellon lay on the sofa in her little drawing-room, listless and drowsy, as was her wont nowadays, and with her head buried in her hands. She roused herself at a loud knock at the door, and bade the person enter. It was old Freeman, the stud-groom.

"Here's Hockley, miss, just coom down from town staäbles. Black harse from Ireland, 'raived last neet."

"What horse, Freeman?"

“Waät harse, eh? Mai bairn, thee’rt gangin’ daft wi’ soommut; ai heeard not waät! Waät harse? why, black harse we bought of Markis Clommel—black hoonter which Johnson wrote aboot last week.”

“Ay, ay, I recollect! What does Hockley say of him?”

“Hockley says he’s tearer! groom as browt him to steamer said as nowt could hold him! Ise warrant we teach him manners!”

“Yes; I’ll do that myself, and at once too! I want a little rousing. Put a pair into the wagonette, Freeman, and drive me down to Down Street. I’ll give this horse a turn at once!”

Besides her establishment at The Den, Kate Mellon had a set of stables near Piccadilly, which were mainly devoted to the reception of new arrivals from the country, and as temporary resting-places for the horses required for Rotten-Row pupils. These stables were equally perfectly appointed with The Den; and when the wagonette containing Kate and her head-groom drove in, she found a portion of her staff ready to receive her.

"What's this new Irish horse like, Tanner?" said she to her town manager.

"A bad 'un, miss; a rank bad 'un as ever stepped! Good 'oss, fine-made 'oss! jump any think; good slopin' shoulders, and henormous quarters; but the temper of—savin' your presence—the devil! He pinned one of the men when he was a-dressin' him this morning, and his hi rolls fearful;" and Mr. Tanner, who, though a thorough horseman, was an undeniable Cockney, led the way towards the loose box where the new arrival was standing. "They calls 'im Balthazar," said he; "and if that means a out-an'-out bad 'un, they're right."

They found him in a loose box at the end of the yard, a big brown-black horse, sixteen and a half, set off with a long lean head, deep neck, round barrel, deep chest, low back, short forehead, big broad foot. As the door of the box opened he turned his eye round, showing an inflamed white, put back his ears, and lashed out savagely.

"Hold on, mon!" said old Freeman; "steady,

boy; let's look at thee;" and the old man went fearlessly up to the horse's head, and placing his hand in the head-collar, commenced turning him about.

"Send one of your men for my saddle, Tanner, and put No. 3 bridle on him. Is No. 3 the one with the deep port? Yes, that's it," said she, touching it with her whip. "I'll just see what he's made of in the Row."


"Miss," said old Freeman, coming up close to her, and whispering, "better wait till t'see wait's made of oop in tan-ride at whoom—naästy brute, I'm thinkin' 't 'ill prove."

"Ah, never mind, Freeman; there's room in the Row to give him a very good bucketing. Bring him out."

He came out with a bound, and backed and reared and kicked when any one approached him, so that fully five minutes had elapsed before Kate, with all her readiness and agility, found herself on his back. Once mounted he started off at once, pelting over the uneven stones, and slipping about in a manner that made old Freeman hold up

his hands and curse the Paving Commissioners, with even more than his usual energy.

Down one incline of Piccadilly and up the other went Balthazar, now and then trying his chance of a buck-jump, occasionally manifesting his inclination to rear. So through the Arch and into the Row. There Kate thought he might have his fling; there was no one within sight; and "to take it out" of a brute like this was a feat in which at one time she would have taken infinite pleasure; even now it promised some excitement. So quietly drawing the curb and simultaneously touching him with her heel, she felt the big brute give one tremendous plunge and snort, and then dart off like lightning. And now Kate's colour came again, and her heart leapt within her as she felt once more the ecstasy of tearing speed. Away he goes, easy as a chair when once he has settled into his stride, and with more real go in him than she has felt in any horse she has ridden for months. Bravo, Balthazar! Whoop, boy! get along! and the blue habit floats behind, and the gravel flies round her, and she is going the



real pace now, and no mistake! Who is this rider creeping out across her path from beneath the trees? Steady, boy, steady! by Jove, he's got the bit between his teeth, and there's no stopping him! Soho, soho, man! a shake—another; that's done it! the bit's free, and she pulls him up easily; and to her pulling him rides up a man, flushed, with working lips and scarlet face—Charles Beresford. She stares at him with starting eyes and compressed lips, through which comes the word “Charley!”

“It *is* you, you she-devil, is it?” said Beresford: “I thought it must be. This is fate that has sent you here to hear me curse you. I know what you've done, fast enough. You thought you could stab in secret, did you, you Jezabel? and without its being known where the blow came from! But I saw your infernal hand, and when I saw it, I cursed you as I curse you now!”

“Charley! Charley! oh, for God's sake; oh, if ever you cared for me—”

“Cared for you! I never did! I told you so

—told you at least as plainly as a man could tell a woman ; and then in sheer revenge—in dirty, low, mean revenge—you do this ; but I'll be even with you. I'll—stand off, curse you ! take your hand off, I say—”

She had laid her hand on his arm. He shook it off roughly, and in shaking it off raised his whip-hand spasmodically, and struck Balthazar sharply in the mouth. The Irish horse reared up on end straight as a dart, forced to his feet, plunged for an instant, and then started off in a mad gallop. Kate sat like a rock, pulling—pulling without the slightest effect. Then looking down she saw he had his eye turned back towards her, and held the bit in a firm grip between his teeth. This time the shake was no use ; he would not loose his grip, and the bit was useless. They are nearing the end of the Row, and she remembers, shudderingly, the heavy iron gates, between which it would be impossible to steer him. If she could but turn him into the Drive, and so head up towards the Serpentine bridge ! A touch with her leg and a sharp tug at the rein ; the Irish horse

rises like a bird at the iron bars, but touches them with his fore-feet, and falls headlong into the Drive, rolling over on to his rider, who lies there crushed and motionless.

CHAPTER VII.

“BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT.”

WHEN Mr. Scadgers walked into the lobby of the Tin-Tax Office soon after noon on the day on which Mr. Beresford had announced to Mr. Simnel his intention of taking some decisive step in the Schröder business, he asked to be shown to Mr. Simnel. The abruptness and audacity of this demand struck dismay into the breasts of the attendant messengers; they could scarcely believe their ears. Mr. Scadgers was not unknown in the classic regions of Rutland House: in all the various departments of that grand governmental hive he drove a roaring trade; and though it was mostly carried on by correspondence, or through agents, yet he occasionally appeared in person on the scene, notably on Quarter-days, for the purpose of “bouncing” an instalment out of recal-

citrant debtors. So, had he inquired for any of the junior clerks, or for any recognised black sheep of higher standing, he would have been quietly shown into the waiting-room apportioned for the reception of the public, and a light-heeled Mercury would have been torn from the perusal of the newspaper, and, with his tongue in his cheek, have been started off to summon the indebted one. But when Mr. Simnel's name was mentioned, it was quite a different thing. The head messenger, who had never before attended to Mr. Scadgers, condescended to listen to what he had to say, at the same time deadening any hopes which might have been entertained with a chilling shoulder-shrug. "I'll see, sir," said he,— "I'll see; but I think the Seckittary is partic'lar engaged just now: if you'll take a seat, sir, I'll let him have your name; but—" "That's all; you tell him I'm here," said Mr. Scadgers, simply; "I'll stand the racket about his seeing me or not." The chief messenger shook his head as he walked slowly towards the secretarial apartment: he knew that no business in Mr. Scadgers' peculiar line

could be on foot between that worthy and Mr. Simnel; for did not he, the chief messenger, take the Secretary's pass-book to the bank; did he not pay-in moneys, and get cash for his master's cheques; and was he not consequently aware that a very capital balance was always standing in Mr. Simnel's name? What could it be? The chief messenger's astonishment was increased when he received his orders to show the “party of the name of Scadgers” in at once to the secretarial presence; was at its height when, bidden to send for a cab, he saw the Secretary and Mr. Scadgers drive away together.

Arrived at Austin Friars, Mr. Simnel bade his companion wait in the outer office, while he himself was shown into the sanctum. He found Mr. Townshend somewhat aged and broken, but invested with all such relics of his former haughtiness as he could command. He received his visitor with studied cold politeness, pointed him to a chair, and waited for him to speak.

“I was sorry,” began Simnel, “to be compelled to ask you to return home; but the fact

is that the business was urgent, and I had no alternative. You comprehend?"

"I comprehend, sir," answered Mr. Townshend, "that the last time I saw you you proved yourself possessed of a secret, on the keeping of which depends my—almost my life! The possession of this secret enables you to dictate terms to me at your own convenience. Your convenience is now. You ordered me to come here to hear your terms, and I am here. Isn't that so?"

"You put matters a little harshly, Mr. Townshend; as, when you have heard what you are pleased to call my terms, I think you will allow. I do not come merely to dictate terms to you, as I at one time thought I should. There are wheels within wheels in my scheme; and I must take off the front, and show you the whole scheme at work before you will be able to see the mechanism of it. The last time I had the pleasure of talking with you, you asked me what I wanted; I told you nothing. Since then I have made up my mind. I want justice!"

"BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT." 151

"Justice!" echoed the old man, turning deadly white; "justice!"

"Justice!" said Simmel; "not *on* any one though, merely *for* somebody. Pardon my again asking about that door. Nobody to listen, eh? All right! Last time I was here I had a notion in my head, which has since resolved itself into a certainty, and into the pivot on which all my action turns. I must bore you with old memories once more, I'm afraid. You recollect that, while you were at Combcardingham with our old friends Pigott and Wells, you formed an acquaintance with a very pretty girl—a 'hand' in one of the factories? You shake your head, eh? it *is* a long time since, and these sort of things get pushed from one's mind by other affairs, and—however, I think you'll recollect her when I mention her name. Does the name Ann Moore convey to you—Ah! I thought so! I'll wait a minute, if you please; there's no hurry."

"Go on, sir; go on!" said Mr. Townshend, whose face was hidden in, and supported by, his hands.

“An attachment sprung up between you and Ann Moore, I think, which was the cause of great distress to her only relation, a brother, with whom she lived. This brother and you exchanged words—if not blows—on this subject, and the result was that the girl left her brother and went to live with you. Did you speak?”

If he had spoken, he did not repeat what he had said, but sat there still and silent.

“She had been living with you for about a year when that unfortunate affair of the acceptance happened. You were obliged to leave Combcardingham; but you were not obliged, so far as I can make out, to leave it as you did—without giving her the least notion of your intention; without leaving her one shilling to support herself or your little child! She could not go back to the factory; she had not been there since the child’s birth; and she was weak and ill, and unable to do the work. So she and the child starved.”

“Great God!” cried the old man, looking up in horror—“starved?”

“Well—for all you had to do with it! You’re

just as much a murderer as if they actually had perished of want, leaving them as you did! But they didn't. Neighbours found them out only just in time; found out her brother; and he, when he found you'd gone off, came round and took his sister to his heart again. He was a printer just starting for himself, and he took his sister—she'd always been his favourite—to his new home; and there she died three weeks after her arrival.”

“Died? Ann died? not of—”

“No, not of starvation, if you mean that; they said she died of a broken heart at having been deserted by the man she worshipped; but we know by medical science that that's an impossibility—don't we? At all events, she died; and then the printer, who was a rising man, looked after the little girl. He looked after her in an odd way. He had a foster-brother, who was a rider in a circus; and when the little girl was six years old he placed her with the circus-people, where she remained until he started her in life on her own account.”

“She lived, then?”



“Oh dear, yes; lived considerably; lives now and flourishes, and does extremely well. You have heard of a riding-mistress and horse-breaker, Miss Kate Mellon?”

“I have heard of such a person; and I have not heard—”

“Steady, please! Kate Mellon is Ann Moore’s daughter. I need not point out her relationship to you. You shake your head. Proofs of course you want? I’ve taken the liberty of ringing the bell. Be good enough,” added Mr. Simnel, to the clerk who appeared, “to tell that person who is waiting outside to step in. Do you recognise him?” he asked of Mr. Townshend, as Scadgers entered the room.

Mr. Townshend, shading his eyes with his hand, looked long at the new-comer, and then said, “It is George Moore!”

“Right enough, sir,” said Mr. Scadgers; “though it’s many a long day since we met; and we’re neither of us so young as then. Lord bless me! when I look at the Runner—we used to call him the ‘Runner’ because of Townshend of Bow

Street, which was a nickname for him," added he, turning to Mr. Simnel,—“when I look at the Runner, and think how long it is since I left my mark on him about—”

“We won’t trouble you for details,” interrupted Mr. Simnel; “this gentleman acknowledges you as George Moore. Will you state whether you are the brother of Ann Moore, and if so, what became of her and her child?”

“Ann Moore was my sister,” said Scadgers in a low voice, “as this man knows well enough. After he left the town suddenly and without giving her any notice, without leaving her any money, without—there, though it’s so long ago, it makes me mad now when I think of it. When he left her starving and penniless, I took such care of her and the little one as best I could. Then—poor Ann died, and the child came to me. Young Phil. Fox was my foster-brother; and he saw the little girl, and his wife took a sort of fancy to her, having none of their own. So I apprenticed her to old Fox, and she was with him for years, until I had got on in life and made some money; and

then I thought I'd do what was right by the child, not letting myself be known in the matter, for I couldn't get over poor Ann's disgrace; and I fetched her away and had her put to business for herself."

"You didn't have her called by her mother's or her father's name, I believe?"

"No; her mother's name was shame to me; her father's would have been worse; so I called her Kate Mellon, after my mother's people; and by that name she's gone ever since."

"Thank you. You hear this testimony, Mr. Townshend; you—"

"I hear! I hear!" said the old man testily. "I hear what may possibly be a clever story arranged between two men for the purposes of extortion—"

The black cloud settled on Mr. Simnel's face; but before he could speak, Scadgers burst in: "Extortion! if I'd wanted any thing of you, Mr. George Townshend, shouldn't I have had it years ago? I've known where you've been and what money you've been making for the last eighteen

years; and if I'd wanted any thing of you, I could have come down on you at any time. But I scorned it for me or for my sister's flesh and blood, just as I scorn it now! Extortion! why—"

"There! you're very naturally annoyed and excited, my good sir; but I think we shall bring Mr. Townshend to reason," said Mr. Simnel. "I don't think I need detain you any longer. I shall see you in a very short time, and, I hope, have some satisfactory news to communicate. Good-day!" and Mr. Simnel shook hands with Mr. Scadgers, who made a very curt bow to Mr. Townshend, and departed. Then Simnel turned to the old man, and said, "I make every allowance for your annoyance in this matter, Mr. Townshend; but you can no longer really doubt the truth of this statement."

"And suppose I admit it, sir; what then? To what end have you hunted up this story and—and the other, which you hold *in terrorem* over me? What views of yours am I to meet? What price am I to pay for past follies?"

"Follies is an easy word," said Simnel, with a

grim smile; "but I don't think my proposition is a hard one. I am attached to Miss Moore—Kate Mellon—call her what you like—your daughter, I mean—honourably attached to her; but you, as a man of the world, will see that it would be impossible for me to marry a girl who is simply known for her eccentricity and her daring; who has no position in society—no relations—no any thing which the world demands, save money, and even of that she has not sufficient. You follow me?"

"Yes, sir, yes," said Mr. Townshend, who had again buried his face in his hands.

"Well, then, what I propose," said Simmel, who was getting annoyed at the old man's manner, "and what, moreover, I intend, by means of the hold which I have over you, to carry out, is this: you must acknowledge this young lady as your daughter; take her to your house, and let her live there for a month or two; let our wedding—a formal wedding, with all friends invited—take place from there; and you must give her ten thousand pounds."

"BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT." 159

"I refuse!" said Mr. Townshend; "I entirely refuse; I—"

"Oh, no, you don't," interrupted Mr. Simnel; "you'll think better of it. Why shouldn't you? You gave Mrs. Schröder, who didn't want it at all, twenty thousand; but you're not so well off just now, I know."

"How do you know that, you who are so well-informed on all my affairs?"

"Well, I think I know pretty nearly every shilling you have out," said Simnel, rubbing his knee; "and Cotopaxis and Tierra del Fuegos have gone down like water lately. No; as matters stand, I'll be content with ten thousand."

"I did not so much mean about the money. I do not say that I would not pay the sum you name to be rid of the annoyance; but I will never undergo the humiliation of acknowledging that connexion."

"Better that than the humiliation of standing in the Old-Bailey dock! Better that than stone-quarrying at Portland at your time of life, sir, I can tell you, besides humiliation. Nonsense! It

is not as if the acknowledging this daughter would hurt the prospects of the other. She has done with you now. If she marries again, it will be as Mr. Schröder's widow, without reference to you. Don't you understand?" ("He didn't like that allusion to Portland," said Simmel to himself. "I distinctly heard his teeth chatter as I said the word.")

"And suppose I were to consent to this proposition, sir," said the old man in a tremulous voice, "what guarantee have I that you might not come upon me at some future time for more money, or the gratification of some other wish; and that, on my refusal, you might not betray that horrible secret which you hold?"

"Now, my dear sir, there your usual sound common-sense has for once deserted you. Is it likely that, when once you are my father-in-law, I should proclaim a gentleman whose connexion with me I had taken so much pains to make public, as—pardon me—as a felon?"

Mr. Townshend cowered back in his chair, as Simmel, leaning forward to impart additional ear-

nestness to his manner, uttered these last words. For a minute or two there was a dead silence; then the old man, with a terrible effort at collecting himself, asked, "When do you require an answer to this demand?"

"An answer? Immediately! I cannot conceive that there can be any question as to the answer to be returned. I am sure that you, my good sir, could not be mad enough to object to what is, under all the circumstances, really a very reasonable proposition. I merely want you to pass your word to agree to what I have placed before you, and we will then settle the time for carrying the arrangement into effect."

"What delay will you grant me?"

"Now, upon my word, Mr. Townshend," said Simnel, in a semi-offended tone, "this is scarcely polite. You ask for delay, as though you were ordered for execution, instead of having what might have been a very unpleasant affair settled in a thoroughly satisfactory manner."

"You must pardon me, sir," said Mr. Townshend; "I am an old man now. I am broken with

illness; and this interview has been too much for me. Pray end it as speedily as possible." Indeed he looked as wan and haggard as a corpse.

"Poor devil!" thought Simnel, "I pity him thoroughly. But there must be no shrinking now, and no delay, or that Schröder-Beresford business may fall through; and then—" "I must get you to act at once, then, Mr. Townshend, if you please," he said aloud. "Your daughter had better come to you at once, and we can then be married in a month or six weeks' time."

Mr. Townshend bowed his head. "As you please, sir; perhaps you will see me again to-morrow, or the day after. Just now I can settle nothing; my head is gone." And so the interview ended.

"I must keep him to it, by Jove!" soliloquised Mr. Simnel; "and pretty tight too, or it will fall through yet. He looked horribly ill, and he'll be going off the hooks without any recognition or any settlement, and then we should be neatly in the hole; for, of course, not one single soul would believe the story of Kitty's birth, though told by

“BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT.” 163

me and sworn to by Scadgers. And now I must let her know the whole truth, and ask for the reward. It's been a hard fight, and it isn't won yet.”

CHAPER VIII.

MINISTERING ANGELS.

A CROWD gathered round her in an instant. A nurserymaid, with her shrieking, frightened, inquisitive charges; a man who had been reading a book, and who still retained it open in his hand; a Life-guardsman who, jauntingly striding along with a cane under his arm, had seen the horse jump and fall, and had him by the bridle so soon as he staggered to his feet, after rolling; a few vagrant boys, who came whooping from under the trees where they had been at play; and two old gentlemen, who had been silently pacing up and down together. Flecked with foam, covered with gravel, and bleeding at the knees and mouth, Balthazar stood trembling all over; and now and then looking down in wonder at his mistress, who lay there, her head supported on a man's knee,

her face deadly white, with one small thread of blood trickling down her forehead. The man on whose knee she lay passed his hand rapidly down her side and in the region of her heart. He was a park-keeper—a big brown-bearded man, whose decorated breast showed what deadly service he had seen—a stalwart giant with the heart of a child, for the tears were in his eyes, and his voice was any thing but steady as he looked up and said, "It beats yet!" It was to the guardsman he said it—the guardsman, who gave Balthazar's bit a wrench, and who muttered hearty curses on the horse for spoiling the beauty of such a comely lass.

"All your fault, you blunder-headed brute, it was! The lady sat him like a bird, but he got the bit between his teeth and came bolting down the Row; and when she tried to turn him over the rails, he jumped short, the beast, and went slap on to his head. Yarr!" and he gave the horse another chuck in the mouth, and looked as if he would have liked nothing so well as to punish him on the spot.

As he spoke, a carriage drawn by a pair of horses came whirling down the Drive. It contained two ladies, one of whom, seeing the crowd, sat up, and pointed it out to her companion. Then they both looked eagerly out, and checked the coachman just as they reached the spot. By his mistress's orders the footman descended, inquired what had happened, and returned to the carriage to report. The next minute Alice Schröder, closely followed by Barbara Churchill, was kneeling by Kate Mellon's side.

What was it?—how had it happened?—who was the lady?—did any one know her?—had a doctor been sent for? These questions were asked in a breath, and almost as speedily answered. The story of the accident, so much of it at least as had been witnessed, was narrated. The park-keeper knew the lady by sight as a constant rider in the Row, always splendidly mounted, generally with other ladies, who, he thought, were pupils like; real ladies, the latter, and no doubt about it; for he thought he saw a glimmer of distrust in Barbara's eye; and this poor lady regularly like one

of themselves. Poor lady! always so affable, giving "Good morning" to him and the other park-keepers—never knew her name, no; but no harm in her—one of the right sort, take his word for it. Had a doctor been sent for? Yes; two of the vagrant boys had been started off by the man with the book to fetch the nearest surgeon; but in the mean time several other persons had come up; among them a tall thin gentleman on an old white horse. This gentleman dismounted at once, quietly pushed his way through the crowd, knelt down by poor Kate Mellon's senseless body, and placed his finger on her pulse; then, looking up with a grave, thoughtful, professional smile into Mrs. Schröder's face, said:

"You are a friend of this lady's?"

"Only in my desire to serve her," said poor little Alice, who was the best-hearted little creature in the world, and who was bursting with philanthropy. "Why do you ask?"

"Simply that she must be moved to the nearest house as quietly and as quickly as possible. I am Dr. B.," continued the gentleman, naming a well-

known physician ; “but this is a surgeon’s case, and should be seen by a surgeon at once. I fear St. George’s is almost too far off.”

“St. George’s!” said Alice. “Oh, she must not go to an hospital ; she—”

“My dear lady,” said the old physician, “she could not go to any place so good ; but it is a little far off.”

“Then let her go to my house,” said Alice. “I live close here—in Saxe-Coburg Square—just through Queen’s Gate. Let us take her there at once, and—”

“My dear young lady,” said Dr. B., “you scarcely know what trouble you are entailing on yourself. This poor girl is in a very bad way, I am sure, from the mere cursory examination I have been able to make. And—and, pardon me,” he added, glancing at Alice’s widow’s-cap, “but you, surely, have seen enough trouble already for one so young.”

“Will you be kind enough to superintend her being lifted into the carriage?” was all Alice said in reply. And the doctor bowed, and looked at

her with a wonderfully benevolent expression out of his keen gray eyes.

Where had Barbara been during this colloquy? Where, but at the side of the prostrate figure, stanching the little stream of blood that welled slowly from the wound in the forehead, and bathing the deadly cold brow and the limp hands with water that had been fetched from the neighbouring Serpentine. And then, at the doctor's suggestion, the park-keeper fetched a hurdle from the enclosure, and this they stretched across the seats of the carriage, and, covering it with shawls and cloaks and wraps, lifted on to it the prostrate form of Kate Mellon, and with Alice and Barbara attendant on her, and the doctor riding close by, they drove slowly away.

Informed by the doctor that it would be dangerous to attempt to carry the patient upstairs, Mrs. Schröder had sent the footman on with instructions; and by the time they arrived at the house, they found that a bed had been prepared in the library, a room on the ground floor, unused since Mr. Schröder's death. As they passed

through Queen's Gate Dr. B. had cantered off, promising to return in a minute, and they had scarcely laid poor Kitty on the bed before he appeared, followed by a handsome bald-headed man, with a keen eye and a smile of singular sweetness, whom he introduced as Mr. Slade, the celebrated surgeon of St. Vitus's.

"I thought I recognised Slade's cab standing at a door in Prince's Terrace. He drives the most runaway horse in the most easily over-turned vehicle in London ; but I suppose he thinks he can set his own neck when he breaks it, which he is safe to do sooner or later ; so I rode round, and fortunately caught him just as he was coming out. And now I'll leave the case in his hands ; it would be impossible to leave it in better." And so saying Dr. B. bowed to the ladies, exchanged a laugh and a pinch of snuff with his brother-professional, and took his leave.

Mr. Slade then approached the bed, and made a rapid examination of the patient, the others watching him anxiously. His face revealed nothing, nor did he speak until he sent one of the

servants for a small square box, which was, he said, in his carriage. While waiting for this, Alice took heart to speak to him, and ask him if the case was very serious.

"Very," was his quiet reply. "Could scarcely be worse."

"But there *is* hope?"

"There is always hope," said the old man, his face lighting up with his sweet grave smile; "but this is a very bad case. The poor girl's ribs are severely fractured, and there is concussion here," pointing to the head, "which causes her insensibility. The box—thank you. Now, ladies, will you kindly leave the room, and I will join you presently."

When he came into the drawing-room, he said, "It is a compound fracture, and of a very bad kind. I fear she will never pull through; if she does, she must never dream of work again. I presume you ladies have been pupils of hers?"

"Pupils!" said Alice; "no, indeed; was she a governess?"

"We do not even know this poor lady's name,"

said Barbara; "we saw the accident, and Mrs. Schröder had her brought here at once."

"Mrs. Schröder is an angel of mercy," said Mr. Slade, with an old-fashioned bow. "This poor girl lying downstairs is Miss Mellon, a riding-mistress; a most correct and proper person, I've always heard, and one who had a great deal to do in breaking and training horses. I've often seen her in the Park; she rode splendidly; and I cannot conceive how this accident occurred."

"Do you think her senses will return—that she will be able to express any wishes—before—"

"I should think so," said Mr. Slade, not permitting Barbara to finish the sentence; "I think she will probably recover from the concussion, and then she will be sensible. It is the fracture I fear. I'll send a man to her place in Down Street, to let them know where she is, and I'll look round again this evening."

So there Kate Mellon lay helpless, senseless, motionless, watched over unconsciously by two women, one of whom she hated deeply, and by the

other of whom she was held in the greatest detestation. There she lay through the dreary afternoon, through the long evening,—when Mr. Slade came again, bringing with him one of the hospital-nurses,—and through the dead solemn night. Very early the next morning, between seven and eight, Barbara, on her way from her bedroom to the library, was surprised to see Mr. Slade enter the hall, and expressed her surprise.

“Well, it *is* early,” said the kind-hearted surgeon; “but, my dear Mrs. Churchill, I’ve taken a great interest in this poor girl; and as I always take a constitutional round the Park before breakfast, I thought I’d just run across and see her.—Well, nurse, what news? None, eh? Just raise that curtain the least bit—that’ll do. Hm! she’ll get rid of the concussion; but—hm! well, well, not our will, but Thine, hm, hm! Any body come after her yesterday?”

“An old bailiff or stud-groom,” said Barbara, “came down in the evening, and entreated to be allowed to see his mistress. I told him that was impossible, and explained the state of things to him

myself. Poor fellow, he was dreadfully overcome, the tears rolled down his cheeks, and he bemoaned his mistress's fate most bitterly."

"Hm! right not to let him see her then; could have done no good. But she'll probably come to her senses during the day, and then, if she asks to see any body—well, send for them. The refusal might irritate her, and—and it can make very little difference."

"You think then she is—in danger?" asked Barbara.

"My dear young lady," said he, taking her hand, "in the greatest danger. If inflammation of the lungs sets in, as I much fear it will, nothing can save her.—Nurse, I'll write a prescription for a cordial. If she speaks, and sends for any one, give it to her just before they come. It will revive her for a time."

About mid-day, when Alice had gone out for a little air, and Barbara was left alone with the nurse and the patient, there came a groan from the bed, and running up together, they found Kate with her eyes open, staring vaguely before her.

After a few minutes she spoke, in a hoarse strange voice.

"What's this?" she said. "Have I missed my tip at the ribbons and had a spill? Lord, how old Fox will give it me! A-h, my side! This must have been a bad cropper, eh? Hollo! I was fancying I was at the old circus again. Where am I? who are you? what has happened?"

"You are with friends," said Barbara, kneeling by the bed; "you have had an accident, and—"

"Ah, now I recollect! the Irish horse bolted and blundered at the rails! How long ago was it?"

"Yesterday, about this time."

"And I was brought here—to your house! What a kind voice you've got! and I'm bad, eh? I know I must be bad from the pain I'm in, my side hurts me most awful. Has the doctor seen me? what doctor?"

"Mr. Slade: you've heard of him?"

"Oh, yes, seen him often; drives a rat-tailed bay in a D'Orsay cab; goes the pace; often wondered he didn't break his neck. What does he—"

oh! my side!" She groaned deeply, and while groaning seemed to drop off into a heavy stertorous slumber.

When she roused again, Mr. Slade, was standing over her, holding her pulse. "Well," he asked in a gentle voice, "you know me? Ah, of course you do! I've seen you taking stock of my old rattletrap, as you've spun by me, and laughing at my nag. Pain still? kind of pressure, eh? Yes, yes, my poor lass, I know what you mean; so dreadfully weak too; yes, yes. What, danger? Well, my dear, there's always danger in these cases; and one never knows. Not afraid? no, my brave girl, I know your courage; but—well, there's no harm in settling any little matters which—eh? if in God's good will we come all right, there's no harm done, and—yes, yes; rest now a bit; I'll see you again to-night." And Mr. Slade hurried into his carriage, blowing his nose very loudly indeed with his red-silk pocket-handkerchief, and with two large tears on his spectacle-glasses.

When the door had shut behind him, Kate

called the nurse in a feeble voice, and bade her send for the lady to whom she had previously spoken. In answer to this call, Barbara was speedily by the bedside.

"You—you don't mind my sending for you; do you, dear?" asked Kate, in a low tremulous voice.

"Mind, my poor child,—mind! of course not. What is it, dear?"

"I want you to—do you mind giving me your hand? I can't reach it myself—so, dear; thank you. I want you to do something for me. I—I'm dying, dear—oh, don't shrink from me—I know it; he tried to hide it from me, that kind old man, and bless him for it! but I saw how he looked at the nurse, and I heard her whispering to him behind the screen. I don't fear it, dear. I know—well, never mind! I want to see two people before I go; and I want you to send for them, and let them come here, and let me talk to them—will you, dear?"

"Why, of course, of course," said Barbara, the tears streaming down her cheeks; "but you mustn't

talk in this way,—you mustn't give way so—no one can tell how this will turn out."

"I can," said Kate quietly. "I seemed to know it when I heard the click of that horse's shoes against the iron railing. It all rose before me in an instant, and I knew I was a dead woman. You can't conceive—I haven't said much—but you can't conceive what torture I'm going through with my side. It burns and burns, and presses—there! I won't say any more about it. Now, dear, will you put down the names of the people who are to be sent to?"

"I shall recollect them; tell me now."

"Well, Mr. Simnel, Tin-Tax Office, Rutland House—"

"Yes; and—"

"And Frank Churchill, Esq.—oh, how your grasp tightens on my hand!—Frank Churchill, Esq., *Statesman* newspaper-office—in the City somewhere—they'll find it. What is the matter, dear? You heard me?"

"Yes," said Barbara faintly; "they shall be sent for at once."

“At last,” said she to herself, when she had regained her own room, after despatching the messenger—“at last I shall be enabled to fathom this horrible mystery, and to show those who have doubted, that I was not wrong, after all, in taking the decisive step which I did. If this wretched creature prove to be—as I suppose she will—Frank’s correspondent both at Bissett and at home; if—and yet Mr. Slade said he believed her to be a perfectly correct and proper person, else he would not have permitted her to be received here. Mr. Slade’s belief—what is that worth? Is it possible that—no! Here is a woman, poor creature, believing herself to be on her deathbed, and sending for my husband,—a woman of whose existence I have never heard, who is obviously not a person of society, and yet who—great Heavens, if it be proved!—if the worst that I have dared to imagine be proved! And yet lately I have felt that that is impossible, in thinking over Frank’s character and ways of life, in thinking over all he has said of dishonour and deception, I have felt certain that—and yet

here is this woman sending for him, not to his private house,—‘*Statesman* office, somewhere in the City — they’ll find it.’ *Statesman* office! That’s where the first letter was addressed, and re-directed to Bissett; and the second letter,—the envelope, I mean,—now I think of it, was sent to the same place. It *must* be the same. And yet how sweet, and patient, and resigned she is! how quiet and calm, and—Frank Churchill, Esq.!—no mistake in both the names! Who is the other man, I wonder? Frank Churchill! what an extraordinary fate has planned this for us! I’ll see their interview, and hear all that she has to say; and then if—of course it can’t be otherwise—what other solution can there be? If Frank has intrigued with this—and she going to die too; lying there at the point of death, and looking up into my face with so much gratitude and affection—oh, Heaven direct me! I’m at my wits’-end!” and Barbara threw herself on her bed and wept bitterly.

The short dim twilight had faded into dusk before the cab containing the messenger and the

two gentlemen whom he had been sent to fetch arrived at the house. They were ushered at once into the dining-room, where they were received by Pilkington the butler, who produced refreshment. That being declined, they were shown into the library. In the middle of the room stood the bed in deep shadow; across the far end of the room stood a large folding screen, almost hidden by which was a woman with her back to them, bending over a table and apparently engaged in compounding some medicine or drink. A shaded lamp placed on a table between the bed and the screen shed a dim light throughout the room. As the door opened, Mr. Simnel entered first, with a faltering step, strode swiftly to the bedside, and then dropped on to his knees, burying his face in his hands. Kate moved her arm with great difficulty until her hand rested on his head, and then she said, half trustingly, half reproachfully, "Robert!" There was no spoken reply, but the man's big strong frame heaved up and down convulsively, and the tears came rushing thick as rain through his closed fingers.

"Robert, my poor fellow! you must not give way so; you'll break me down. I hadn't a notion you—and yet how faithfully you've served! I saw it, Robert; I knew it long ago, when—ah, well, all over now; all over now, Robert, eh?—What, Guardy, you here too! That's well. Ah, I feel so much more composed now I see your dear solemn old face. You came at once."

"Came at once, my poor child—my poor dear child—" and Churchill's voice failed him and he stopped.

"Now, Guardy, come! You won't have much more trouble with your bothering charge, and you must be steady now. It gives me fresh courage, I declare, to hear your solemn voice and to know that you're at my very side for all sorts of serious advice.—Now, Robert, you know that I'm in a bad way; that I'm going to — no, no, be a man, Robert; you'll upset me, if you give way so.—Guardy, this gentleman, Mr. Simnel, has been very, very kind to me for a long, long time. He wanted to marry me, Guardy; and wanted me to have a proper place as his wife, and so he's

been hunting up all about my friends and my birth and that, and he's found out a lot. But he doesn't know about you, Guardy; and as I wanted to tell him about that, and to settle one other thing, I sent for you both to-night. The—the medicine!—ask nurse—I'm a little faint!"

Both men rose; but Simnel was nearest, and it was into his hand that the woman behind the screen placed the glass. When Kate had swallowed the cordial, she said, in firmer tones:

"I told you, Robert, that when I left old Fox's circus I was fetched away by two gentlemen, an old fellow and another. This is the other. When we got to the hotel that night, the old man said to me, 'Never you mind who I am, my lass; you won't see me any more after I've once started you in town; but you will see this gentleman, and you'll have to send to him whenever you want advice or any thing else. He's your guardian,' he said, 'and he'll look after you.' I recollect I laughed, and said he looked very young, and giggled out some girl's nonsense; but he—I can see you now, Guardy!—put his hand on my head and told me

he was much older than I, and that he'd had plenty of experience to teach him the ways of the world. I've never seen the old man since; but, oh, how often I've sent for Guardy! I've worried him day and night, written to him whenever I wanted to know any thing: how to treat swells who wouldn't pay, or who were getting troublesome in other ways; when I wanted the landlord seen, or fresh land bought; when—good Lord! when I lost heart over—something—and thought of giving the place up, and selling off and going away, he's kept me as straight as a die; he's never shown the least ill-temper with all my worryings and fidgettings; he's always shown me what to do for the best—and has been my kindest and least selfish and best friend."

"You say too much, Kate," said Churchill; "any thing I have done you have repaid long since by your good sense and docility."

"You could never be repaid, sir, I see plainly enough," said Simnel; "there are few men who would have so acquitted themselves of such a charge, and I shall ever honour and esteem you

for it. But may I ask how you came to be known to the other person of this story, who from some knowledge I guess to be Scadgers the bill discounter?"

"It is easily explained. When I arrived in London from Germany, and determined to make my bread by literature, I wrote where I could, and for what I could get. Some article of mine was seen by Mr. Scadgers, who then owned, amongst other lucrative speculations, a weekly newspaper and a cheap periodical. Pleased with what he had read—or had recommended to him more likely—he sent for me, and after a little discussion, made me editor and manager of both his literary speculations. He paid liberally, and seemed pleased with all I did; then wanted me to undertake the management of others of his affairs, which I declined. But one night in his office he told me the story of this girl—incidentally, as a suggestion for a tale for the paper, I believe; and so interested me that I suggested his removing her from the life she was then leading, and giving her a chance of doing some-

thing for herself. After some discussion he agreed, on the understanding that he should never appear in the matter; but that if he provided the necessary funds, I would manage the whole business and undertake a kind of guardianship of the girl. I hesitated, until I saw her at the circus; then, being somewhat of a physiognomist, and thinking I saw in her face promise of what was wanted—honesty, endurance, and a power of keeping straight in front of adverse circumstances—I consented. The rest you know.”

“Will you take my hand, Mr. Churchill?” said Simnel in a low voice; “God Almighty bless you for—for your kindness and your trust!”

“That’s right!” said Kate, on whom the action had not passed unobserved—“shake hands, you two, good fellows both of you! And now look here—but one word! I didn’t catch all you said, Guardy, but you and Robert seem to have made it all right. And now I want to tell you about something—about—when I’m gone, you know—oh, you silly fellow, Robert, how can I speak if you go on so!—I’ve put away some money, you

know; and I want you to have it, Guardy. You're married, some one told me; and you'll want all that; and you won't despise it, eh? You know it's all honestly come by, and you've seen how it's been made—my accounts, you know, you used to say they were very decently kept; and there'll be no shame in taking it—your wife, I mean, and that sort of thing; you can tell her about it. I wonder what she's like. I should have liked to have seen her, Guardy, though perhaps she wouldn't have cared for such as I. Oh, poor old Freeman and the men at The Den—let them have a year's wages; I've put it all regular in a will which I made last year; you'll find it in the desk—and sell the stud—high prices, most of them. I—my side's awful now—don't go yet—let me have a little—just a little rest—I'm faint and in such—such dreadful pain!"

She fell back exhausted. Simnel still knelt by the bedside convulsed with grief; but Frank Churchill looked round the screen to summon the nurse. No one was there, so he went to the door and called softly. The nurse responded at once

and passed by him ; but as he turned back he saw the butler, who beckoned to him.

“Will you please to step this way, sir?” said the man ; “you’re wanted in the dining-room.”

Churchill followed him ; and as the dining-room door shut behind him, found himself face to face with his wife.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER PRESSURE.

THE dulness of the autumnal season causing a heavy depression every where, by no means relaxed its maleficent influence in room No. 120 of the Tin-Tax Office. The gentlemen therein located had each, as has every man in the world, his own private griefs, anxieties, and worries; and these never blossomed into such full vigour as in the autumn. In the first place, there was no more leave of absence to look forward to, which was in itself a dreadful thing; and then there was looming in the future the approach of Christmas, a dread season which each of the different denizens of No. 120, for different reasons, regarded with dismay. To kind genial Mr. Kinchenton the coming Christmas was specially fearful; for after a long struggle between inclination and duty, a struggle resulting in the victory of the latter, he had

decided upon sending his boy Percy, the apple of his eye, to school after the Christmas holidays; and in the shadow of that coming event he was sitting moping and melancholy. Mr. Dibb was always bad in the autumn; his liver, always rebellious, was thoroughly intractable at that season known as the "fall of the leaf," and remained perfectly quiet, declining to perform any one of the functions intrusted to it, and calmly spurning any attempt to call it into action. So Mr. Dibb's complexion grew more and more like that of the cover of a well-worn school-copy of Ainsworth's Dictionary; and Mr. Dibb's temper became so cranky, that Mr. Crump, the extra-clerk, lived in a perfect cyclone of torn-up letters and accounts to "do over again;" so that said Crump bemoaned his hard fate, and expressed himself as perfectly certain that he should have an earlier attack of chilblains than usual that year. Mr. Boppy too had his private grief, in the shape of a visitor at his establishment, Mrs. Boppy's mamma, a lady of vast size from the manufacturing districts, who had arrived on a month's visit, had mono-

polished the best portion of Mr. Boppy's house, and who demanded to have life shown to her. So Mrs. Boppy had instructed Mr. Boppy to convey her and her mamma to the Thames Tunnel, the top of the Monument, the Crypt of St. Paul's, to the Tower, to Madame Tussaud's wax-work, and other exhibitions much sought after by country people, but seldom visited by Londoners; and had moreover stimulated her husband to ask for various half-holidays, which Mr. Kinchenton would readily have granted, but which were never obtained without a hand-to-hand combat with Mr. Dibb. "Very well, Mr. Kinchenton," he would say, "Mr. Boppy must go, sir, if you say so, of course. You're the head of this room, I believe; though how the work's to be got through with Mr. Prescott absent on leave, Mr. Crump next to useless, and Mr. Pringle, who always takes three-quarters of an hour to his lunch—"

"What's that you're saying about me, Mr. Dibb?" Mr. Pringle would ask from over the top of his desk.

"Says you take three-quarters of an hour for your lunch," would repeat the revengeful Boppy.

"All right! better do that than make yourself a wretched hypochondriac, like some people. Let digestion wait on appetite, and health on both, Boppy! Mr. Dibb's got none of the three; doesn't know what any of them mean; so we must excuse him." And then Mr. Boppy would get his leave, and go away and do dismal duty with his relatives.

Nor was Mr. Pringle in any thing like his usual flow of spirits. He was very mercurial, tremendously affected by the weather; and black skies, cold winds, and empty streets sent him down to zero. Moreover his other-half, his chum, his bosom-friend, Mr. Prescott, was away on leave, paying his long-promised visit to old Mr. Murray of Brooklands; and so Mr. Pringle was left to himself, and sat in his chambers smoking solitary pipes, and learning whole pages of the Comic-Song Book, and perpetually falling asleep over the first page of the first volume of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. For Mr. Kinchenton,

who took great interest in honest George, had told him that no man was worth any thing unless he read something besides trashy novels and Little Warblers; and Mr. Pringle, determining to "go-in for something heavy," had selected the Life of Dr. Johnson, whose *Rasselas* he had read as a child, remembering it as "the adventures of a young cove and an old cove, with a doosid good bit about a bridge, or something in it." Moreover George Pringle was by no means comfortable as to the state of his friend's money-matters. He had himself "ignored," as he phrased it, all his own transactions with Scadgers; but he was in with Prescott on one bill, and he knew that his friend had involved himself with several other pieces of stamped paper in the hands of the same worthy. And George had a strong notion that some of these were overdue; and knowing that the Long Vacation was rapidly drawing to a close, and that Term-time was coming on, he feared that the mighty engines of the law might be set to work, and come a general smash. He had written to Prescott about it; but had only

received a couple of lines in reply, to say that he was very jolly, and that the things would be all right; so that all he could do was patiently to await his friend's return to town.

That happened one night, when Pringle and Boswell had had a severe disagreement, and Pringle had let Boswell drop into the fender, and had gone to sleep with his pipe in the corner of his mouth. There came a heavy bang at the oak, and Pringle, starting up and opening it, found himself face to face with James Prescott,—rosy, stout, jolly, and beaming, with a big portmanteau in his hand.

“Hallo! old man!”

“Hallo! old man! been asleep, eh? lazy old beggar! wanted me to rouse you up! give us a hand to the portmanteau, George, and help him in! that's it! Well,” taking off his coat and making a dive at his friend, and catching him by the shoulders, and peering inquiringly into his face, “and how goes it? what's the news? how are all the buffers at the shop? any body dead? any body got the sack? no promotion? always our luck!”

"Things are much the same, I think; no news any where; they'll be glad to see you back, for they've been grumbling about the work—not that you'll be much help at that, though. And what have you been doing? had a good time?"

"Good time? stunning!" and Mr. Prescott kissed his fingers and waved them in the air. "Never put in such a time in my life. Old boy was splendacious, did every mortal thing one wanted,—good nag to ride, good shooting, capital cellar, let you smoke where you like—no end! My old governor was there too, as happy as a bird!"

"And the young lady—Miss Murray?"

"Oh, Emily! oh, I can't tell you how good that has turned out! She's out and away nicer than any thing that ever was; no nonsense about her; quiet, ladylike, sweet, affectionate little thing! You know, George, there are some women—"

"Yes," interrupted Mr. Pringle—"I know there are! and there are some men who want a glass of grog—and I'm one; and there are

others who are mad spooney—and you're another! I'll mix for you, and we'll light our pipes, and then I shall be in a better frame of mind to listen to your dilation on Miss Murray's excellences."

Mr. Prescott, so soon as their glasses were before them, their pipes in their mouths, and they were established one on either side of the fireplace, lost no time in availing himself of his friend's permission, and plunged into those amatory raptures which we have all of us suffered under at our friends' hands. The singular difference of the young lady to, and her superiority over, every one else, the mixture of sense and sensibility which she displayed, the clever things she said and did, her delicacy, firmness, bashfulness, presence of mind,—all these were dilated on at full length by one gentleman, and listened to with becoming patience by the other. At last, when his friend fairly stopped for want of breath, Mr. Pringle asked,

"And have you put it all right, Jim? of

course you're not carrying on this kind of thing without meaning it; have you squared it with them all?"

"Well, Emily and I understand each other thoroughly; and it's all arranged between us, I think. I mean that I haven't said any thing, you know; but people don't say any thing now in such cases. There's a kind of a—a—"

"Yes," interrupted Pringle—"yes; I suppose there is. But what about her father?"

"I haven't spoken to the old boy yet. Not that I think he'd make much objection, turn rusty, or any thing of that sort, for he's tremendously kind and jolly; but I don't like to talk to him while I've got these infernal debts hanging over me. I don't think it's fair; and yet—Have you heard any thing from old Scadgers, George?"

"No, I haven't heard any thing; but—Never mind, we'll talk about him to-morrow, when you've had a rest, and we're both clearer and cooler than we are now. Now turn in and get a sleep, old man; good-night!"

The next morning, however, when Mr. Pringle introduced the subject of Mr. Scadgers and the acceptances which he held, Mr. Prescott showed a remarkable alacrity in changing the conversation, an alacrity which he exhibited on two or three subsequent occasions. He was in the habit, Pringle observed, of receiving every morning with the greatest regularity a pink-coloured note with a country postmark, and after reading its contents he became very much absorbed, slightly ethereal, and generally indisposed to converse on mundane matters. But honest George Pringle, who had no such pleasant distractions, knew perfectly well that time was running on, and that some positive step must be taken; so on the fourth morning after his friend's return he tackled him resolutely.

“I say, Jim, about those bills? No good fencing about the business any longer; we *must* go into it, or we shall come to grief. I’ve a notion that some of them are overdue already, and I wonder Scadgers hasn’t been here pressing for either a settlement or a renewal.”

"To tell you the truth, George, I'm in a funk about them myself. I saw a very suspicious-looking Jew outside the office as I came in this morning,—a fellow in rusty black, with a blazing nose; and when he came towards me my heart jumped into my mouth. However, he only asked me which was Mr. Beresford's office—"

"Mr. Beresford's?"

"Yes, our swell Commissioner, you know; so I got off easy."

"What's the entire figure that you're liable for—including mine, and all the rest of them, I mean?"

"The entire figure? well, it can't be far off a couple of hundred. I had to spend such a lot when Emily was in town; pit-stalls whenever she went to the Opera, to be near her, and hire of horses, and my share of two or three Greenwich dinners, and all that, walked into no end of tin. I don't know where the deuce I'm to get it, and that's the fact."

"Do you owe any thing else? tailors or boot-makers, or any fellows of that sort?"

“Not a sixpence! I cleared what little bills I had of that kind with part of old Scadgers’ money. And since I got that rise here last month, I could go on as straight as possible on what I get. But it’s the infernal millstone of a back debt round my neck. I don’t know what to do! I can’t go and ask the dear old governor to advance; he’s got quite enough to do with his income, and he’d be awfully knocked over to hear I was in for such a lot.”

“Of course you can’t. Now, look here; I’ll tell you what you must do. You must first pledge your word to me and to yourself—not that any thing can be raised upon it, but it’s the right thing to do—that you won’t borrow another sixpence. And then you must go to old Scadgers and tell him that you’re in a fix; that you can’t pay him in a lump: but that you’ll let him have so much every quarter off the principal, and pay decent interest until it’s cleared off. You must draw-in your horns a little, and live quietly on the remainder. I’ll go security for you to old Scadgers.”

"You're a trump, George; but do you think he'll do it?"

"Do it? he must. He makes far too good an income out of the fellows in this place and other government-offices to have any public row made about him and his goings-on. If it got blown, they'd have a leader on him in the *Scourge* that would take the skin off his old back, and, worse than that, stop his business entirely. No, no; he'll do it fast enough. But we must go to him in a regular business manner. Now what are the dates and amounts of these different things?"

"I've got a memorandum of them in my desk, that I made at the time. I'll get it out. Hallo!" said Prescott, opening his desk, and taking therefrom a sealed letter; "what's this?" holding it up.

"Oh, by Jove, I forgot to tell you! that came while you were away, and I put it in your desk, thinking to name it to you directly you returned. Nothing particular, I hope?"

"I don't know; it's very thick, and I don't know the hand. It cannot be a writ, eh?" and Prescott turned very pale.

“Writs, nonsense! they don’t send writs by post. Don’t you know the handwriting? it’s not round enough for a lawyer’s. Open it, man; open it at once!”

And so, wanting to know the contents of the letter, they actually thought of opening it.

As Prescott opened the envelope he drew from it a thick roll of papers, and unfolding them, looked at them with wonder. Pringle, looking over his shoulder, started; and, taking them from his friend’s hand, exclaimed,

“Bills, by Jove! cancelled bills! look here, the signature torn off and hanging. The very bills you gave to Scadgers; mine, Compter’s, your IOU, and the lot! You’ve been chaffing me, Jim—getting a rise out of me all this time, eh?”

“What do you mean by getting a rise? I’m as innocent in this matter as yourself.”

“But do you mean to say that you didn’t pay them?”

“I mean to say that I’ve never paid Scadgers one individual sixpence!”

"Then I mean to say that you're a devilish lucky fellow; for somebody else has."

"Are these bills paid, then?"

"Oh, don't be so preposterously green, Jim. *Are the bills paid?* Of course they are! paid and returned to you to put in the fire, or do what you like with; you can never be called on for another penny. Well, you're a lucky fellow. No one ever paid any thing for me. Who the deuce can have done this for you?"

"I haven't the remotest idea. It couldn't be Scadgers himself?"

"N—no!" said Mr. Pringle, grinning from ear to ear. "No, I don't think it was Scadgers; he's not entirely in that line. Who is there that knew you were in a fix?"

"No one, not a soul but yourself, and—"

"No, old fellow; I've not paid them, I'll take my oath. Should have been delighted to help you, but hadn't the wherewith."

"Then I'm done. I haven't a notion who can have helped me."

"Well, it doesn't matter, so long as it's done."

You're in luck's way, my boy. All this horrible excitement and doubt brought to an end, and you free as air. I say, how about the keeping quiet and not launching into any extra expense, now? Will you hold to it?"

"I'll swear I will. And, what's more, now I am free, I'll strike while the iron's hot. To-day's Friday; to-morrow a half-holiday. I'll go down to Brooklands by the 2.40 train!"

"I think you're right, Jim," said Pringle, quietly. "You've had your fling, and you seem to have a chance of settling well in life just now. Tell the old father all about yourself,—your income and your chances, I mean,—and don't give him the opportunity of flinging any thing in you teeth hereafter. Well, whoever paid that amount of stuff for you did you a good turn, and no mistake. I wonder who it could be. No use asking Scadgers, he'd be as close as death about it; indeed if there were any hanky-panky, any mystery I mean, he'd always swear he was out whenever one called, for fear it should be bullied out of him."

Indeed, Mr. Pringle, not being of a very impulsive temperament, and not having very much to think about, bestowed far more wonderment on the question as to who could have been Mr. Prescott's anonymous benefactor than did Mr. Prescott himself. That gentleman, in love over head and ears, simply thought of the transaction as a means to an end; in any other position he would have bestowed upon it a certain amount of astonishment, but now all he cared for was to avail himself of the chance it had opened up to him. He had determined that, so soon as he found himself unfettered by debt, he would inform Mr. Murray of his attachment to his daughter, and ask the old gentleman's consent to their getting married. He knew well enough that his own official salary was by no means sufficient to maintain a wife—notably a wife, the daughter of a rich country squire—in the manner to which she had been accustomed; but he knew equally well that the rich country squire would, in all probability, make a handsome settlement on his daughter; and to this he thoroughly looked forward. Not that there should be urged

against him the least suspicion of an *arrière pensée*; he loved the girl with all his heart and soul and strength; but as in these days he would never have thought of riding forth into Fleet Street and proclaiming her beauty and virtue, and challenging all who might feel inclined to gainsay them to single combat,—in like manner, in these days would he never have thought of marrying a woman without money. And this was the youth who would have taken Kate Mellon in her unrecognised position, and, so far as he knew, penniless! Yes, but Kate Mellon was his first love; those were his earliest salad days; he has had much experience of the world since then, and is not honester or fresher from the contest.

There was, however, no doubt about his love for Miss Murray and his desire to see her, so he started off by the first train after business-hours on the next day, and was whirled off to Haverling Station. One may suppose that he had found time to communicate the fact of his intended arrival; for he had scarcely proceeded a few paces up the steep hill which leads from the railway to the vil-

lage before he saw coming spinning towards him a low basket-chaise drawn by a pair of roan gallo-ways in plain black harness. And seated in the basket driving the roans was a young lady in the prettiest little round hat, and with the nicest short sealskin jacket and the daintiest dogskin driving-gauntlets, who gave the knowingest salute with her whip when she saw Prescott, while the groom behind her jumped down and relieved the young gentleman of his portmanteau.

“Punctual, sir, I think!” was the young lady’s salutation after she had rescued the right-hand dogskin gauntlet from a prolonged pressure—“punctual, I think! I say, James, what on earth has brought you down again so quickly? You didn’t give a hint in your note.”

“You, of course,” said Mr. Prescott, looking at her with the greatest delight.

“No, but really! Papa, when he read your note, said he was delighted to have you again, and that he supposed you must have obtained some further leave of absence. But I knew that was not likely, and I felt certain you were coming on

some special business. Oh, James, there's no bad news, is there?"

"No, my darling pet, no bad news,—good, splendid, excellent news! I'd tell you what it is now, but I can't, because it's news that's impossible to be told except with action; and if I were to take action, I should astonish the worthy person who is sitting behind us, and who is taking such care of my portmanteau."

"Oh, James, how can you! You'll drive, of course. I can't fancy any thing more horrible than seeing a gentleman driven by a lady. Now, Bagshaw, all right. And so you won't tell me, James?"

"Not yet, Emily, not yet; and yet I don't see why on earth I shouldn't. Bagshaw seems to be paying the greatest attention to the landscape, and, moreover, has established a wall of portmanteau between us and him of the most satisfactory kind. So I don't mind telling you, that I have come down to propose for you to your father, and to ask his consent to our marriage."

"Oh, James, I never did! And ask papa's

consent, indeed! Do you know that you've never asked mine, sir?"

"Haven't I? Well then, darling, I'll ask it now. No, no! what nonsense! Bagshaw can't see under the rug, and I can hold the ponies perfectly with one hand: give it me! So; and now about papa; what do you think? what do you advise?"

"I—I think he won't make any fuss, James; he's always full of your praises, and he's not like those horrid fathers in books, who never will let their daughters marry the people they love—I didn't mean to say that—I meant the people who love them! But I think I'd speak to him after dinner."

"After dinner?"

"Yes, you know, when you're left alone together. He's pleasanter then, I think. And then you can come to me in the drawing-room and tell me all about it."

Mr. Murray received James Prescott with the greatest cordiality; and when dinner was over, and the cloth was removed, the old gentleman in-

structed Banks the butler to bring up a bottle of the '20 and some devilled biscuits. Banks, an old and faithful retainer, muttered something in his master's ear as to what Dr. Harwood had said; on which his master told him to go to the devil, and mind his own business. So the '20 was brought; and Miss Murray had half a glass, and then retired to the drawing-room; and Mr. Murray bade his guest pull his chair round to the fire and prepare for serious drinking.

Then James Prescott knew that the crisis of his fate was approaching, so he filled a bumper of port, drank half of it, looked the old gentleman steadily in the face, and said, "I wanted to speak to you, sir."

"All right!" said the old gentleman, helping himself; "speak on."

"About your daughter, Miss Murray, sir," said Prescott, beginning to feel himself all aglow,—"about Miss Murray, sir."

"All right!" said the old gentleman, with perfect calmness—"what about her?"

"Well, sir—I—the truth is—that I—I've

formed an attachment to her, sir—she's—she's a most delightful girl, sir," said Prescott, failing into hopeless bathos at once.

"She is, James," said the old gentleman,—like the sphynx, 'staring straight on with calm eternal eyes,'—"she is."

"She is, indeed, sir. I believe I may say that Miss Murray is aware of my entertaining this notion, sir—and that—that she's not displeased at it."

"Of course not, of course not, James; what girl would be displeased at the notion that a young fellow found her delightful?"

"Confound it! he won't give me a leg up, any how," said poor Prescott to himself. Then aloud, "If I could gain Emily's—Miss Murray's consent, sir, would you have any objection to me for her husband?"

"Ah, ha! ah, ha! James!" laughed the old gentleman in great delight—"got it out at last, eh, my boy?—been beating about the bush this ten minutes. I saw you, I knew what was coming, but I wouldn't help you. You're not so good at this kind of business as your father would have

been. The vicar would have had it all out in a minute; and if the girl's father had said no, he'd have run away with her that night. Desperate fellow Alan is — was, I mean; we're all stupid enough now! And so you want to marry Emily? and you say, if she consents, will I? If she consents?—nonsense, James Prescott! do you think I've forgotten that alphabet? or that it has changed during the last forty years? It's just the same as it was, sir, and I recollect every letter of it! You and Emily have understood each other this long time. No, I've no objection to make. I'd sooner your father's son would marry my daughter than any duke in the land. You've not much money, but I've plenty, and none to care for but her. One thing, how much are you in debt?"

"Not a sixpence."

"On your honour?"

"On my honour."

"That's enough for me! Your father knows of this."

"Not yet, sir. I haven't mentioned it to him; but—"

“But I have! We talked it all over when he was here. So you see we old people are not so blind as you think us. Now, you’re dying to go to Emily, and I’m dying to have a nap. Let us oblige each other.”

Mr. Prescott did not need a repetition of the hint. In the course of the next two minutes he was in the drawing-room; and the selections from *Lucia*, with which the piano was resounding, were suddenly stopped, and were heard no more until the advent of the old gentleman caused a necessity for candles and calm propriety. I do not think it is necessary for me to reproduce the dialogue which was carried on during the interval. It was very silly and very pleasant; perfectly easy to be imagined, and ought never to be described. Only one bit of it is worth preservation.

“Were you ever in love before, James?”

“Once, dearest; only once in my life.” (If he had been the age of old Parr instead of six-and-twenty, he could not have said it with more earnestness.)

“And why did you not marry her?”

“It would not have done, darling. She was not of our grade in life. It would have been a wretched business. She felt that, and told me so.”

“Poor girl, poor girl!” said little Emily; “I wonder where she is now!”

Prescott did not answer. He was too full of his present happiness to think of his former love, who was at that moment lying with her life’s breath ebbing fast away.

CHAPTER X.

“WE KISSED AGAIN WITH TEARS.”

As Frank Churchill advanced into the dining-room in the fading light, he saw Barbara standing by the mantel-piece. Her face was turned towards him, but her eyes were dropped to the ground. She did not raise them as her husband entered, but remained in the same attitude, while he stopped short as the butler closed the door behind him. Frank Churchill was not entirely taken by surprise; he knew that his wife had been staying with her friend Mrs. Schröder, and this fact flashed across him when he first received Kate Mellon's summons: but he thought that she might have left the house; that she might have gone probably to her aunt Miss Lexden—at all events, that there was no earthly reason to prevent him from obeying that summons, and going to one who had always

understood that she had a claim upon him. If his wife were there, it was not likely that he would come across her. She had now been absent some weeks from her home, and during that time she had not made the slightest sign, had not shown the least contrition, the least desire for a reconciliation; had not made the smallest advance in any one shape or way; consequently, she would be as opposed to any interview as he could be, and would take care to prevent it. As opposed as he could be? Yes; that was giving it a very definite range; he felt that he could trust himself now under any influence. All that had been ductile within him had gradually been growing hard and rigid; all his love and tenderness, his devotion to and pride in his wife had gradually died out; his very nature seemed to have changed: where he had been trusting, he had become sceptical; where he had been hopeful, he had become doubtful; where he had been generous, he had become cynical. All his good aspirations, his domestic virtues, seemed to have deserted him. What his mother had fondly hoped, when the separation between hus-

band and wife came,—that her son would be restored to her as he was before his marriage,—never had been realised. For the first few days, fearing the gossip of the world, he came home regularly to the house in Great Adullam Street, where the old lady had been reinstalled; dined, and remained at home during the evening, until he went down to see the proof of his article at the *Statesman* office. But while at home, he was any thing but his old self. In the bygone days he had been full of chat and rattle, keeping his mother alive to all the current gossip of the day, talking to her of new books, new men, new opinions. Now he sat moody and silent over the dinner-table,—moody and silent over his meerschaum-pipe after dinner over the fire, resting his chin on his hand, dreaming vaguely of the past, vaguely of the future. Then, after a little time, he began to tire of the sameness, to long for excitement and variety, and he commenced to dine at the Retrenchment night after night, sitting late over his wine in the coffee-room, then going up and sitting in the smoke-room until late hours of the night. He

never joined tables with any one at dinner; he never gave or accepted any further courtesy with his friends than the interchange of a short nod; but occasionally at night he would launch out into conversation in the smoke-room, where he began to gain some renown as a sayer of harsh sayings and bitter jests.

Yes, this was what remained of the genial, kind-hearted, easy-going Frank Churchill. His friends were in despair. His mother, poor old lady, felt that the state of things now was infinitely worse than when Barbara was in the house; for then, though she only saw her son occasionally, she believed him to be happy; but now she scarcely ever saw him at all, and knew him to be thoroughly wretched. She had no satisfaction in keeping house for him; there was no use in ordering dinner which he did not eat; in "tidying" a house which he did not look at; in hunting up and hustling into order servants who might have been as servile as Eastern slaves, or as insolent as American helps, for all their master cared. The old lady's occupation was gone, and she knew it;

she felt even more than ever that her position was lost, that she could not hope to supply the place of her who was absent now, however well she and her son might have got on before his marriage; and she was proportionably miserable and disappointed. George Harding too was greatly annoyed at Frank's conduct. His loyal soul allowed that his friend had been hardly dealt by; but he contended boldly that since Barbara's first false step, Frank had been entirely in the wrong. He contended that the husband should have gone to seek his erring wife, and should have endeavoured, by every means in his power, to bring her back to his home. When you talked of pride and that sort of thing to George Harding in a matter of this kind, he snapped his fingers loudly and said “stuff!” There was no hint at any crime, at even any lightness of conduct, was there? Well then, there was but one course to pursue. When Frank distinctly refused to follow this advice, Harding shrugged his shoulders and left him to himself; but when he saw the dreary, vapid, aimless life that his friend was pursuing, the change that had come over him in every

way, he prayed for an opportunity of once more taking him to task in an affectionate and friendly spirit. This opportunity had not been given, and Harding could find no chance of fault-finding in his friend's work, which, though horribly bitter and slashing, was cleverer than ever.

The noise of the closing door rang drearily through the room, and Barbara keeping silence, Churchill felt it incumbent on him to speak. His throat was quite dry, his lips parched and quivering; but he made an effort, and the words came out. "You sent for me?" he said.

"I did," replied Barbara, still keeping her head bent and her eyes downcast: "I wished to speak with you."

"I am here," said Churchill coldly.

"I wished to tell you that—that I have learned a bitter lesson. I wished to tell you that, only to-night, only within the last few minutes, I have discovered that I have been deceived in—in certain matters that have passed between us—that I have done you—done you wrong."

Churchill merely bowed his head.

“I was present in the next room when what has just passed there took place. I was present, and I heard every word. It was by no chance, by no accident, I heard it; I was there intentionally and for the purpose. When that poor girl now lying there sent for you, I felt assured that I should gain the key to that mystery which ruined our married happiness; I felt assured that I should arrive at a solution of that mystery; and now it is solved. You, who know my pride, may judge what fearful interest that question must have had for me when I descended to such means to gain my ends.”

Churchill bowed again, but said not a word.

“I have heard it,” continued Barbara—
“heard the story from first to last. That poor stricken creature lying there, on what we both know to be her death-bed, is ignorant even of my name, far more of my relationship to you. From her lips I stand convicted of my mistake; from her lips I learn that I have done you an injustice. I asked you to come in here that I

might acknowledge this to you." For the first time during the interview, she raised her eyes; they met those of her husband, which were cold and pitiless.

"You are very good; but don't you think your admission comes rather late? Pardon me one minute,"—Barbara had made a sign as though about to speak,—"I'll not detain you more than one minute. I wooed you as humbly as any rightminded man could, more humbly than some would think fit and proper; but let that pass. Before I asked you to share my life, I showed you plainly what that life was; I did not withhold one jot of its difficulties, its restrictions, its poverty, if you will. I pointed out to you plainly and unsparingly the sacrifices you would have to make, certain luxuries—little perhaps in themselves, but difficult to do without, from constant use—which you would have to give up. I put before you what I knew would prove—(as it has proved) the fact, that, if you married me, the set of people amongst whom you had always lived would consider you had demeaned yourself, and

would give you up. I pointed all this plainly out to you,—did I not?”

“You did.”

“And you, having heard it all, and weighed it as much as women with any thing like heart in them do weigh such matters, agreed to link your lot with mine. Good. We married, and I brought you to your home; not a brilliant home by any means, not a fairy bower likely to catch the fancy of a young girl, but still, I make bold to say, a comfortable enough home, and one out of which, mind you, my mother—one of the common-minded, commonplace people so sneered at by your superior race—removed, of her own free will, in order that you might be its sole mistress. You follow me?” he asked, for her head had drooped again and he could not see her face.

She murmured some indistinct answer, and as he looked across he thought he saw the trace of tears upon her cheeks.

“What was the result?” he continued. “From that time out, you began to change. There were great allowances to be made for you, I grant.

The place was dull, the house small, the furniture meagre; the persons amongst whom you were thrown strange and entirely different from any you had previously mixed with. But the house was your own; the furniture sufficient for our wants; the people anxious to receive you kindly and hospitably, to make you feel welcome, to do any thing for you for my sake. My mother, in some respects a peculiar woman, came out of the semi-seclusion in which she had lived for years, to show her regard for you; she wanted you to share in that wealth of affection which she lavished on me; she wanted you to be as much her daughter as I was her son. Did you respond to this in any way? No. Did you try to content yourself with the lot which you had accepted? No. Did you, knowing full well how all were striving for you, endeavour to accommodate yourself to, and make the best of, circumstances? No, no, no! You sit moping and indolent in your house, leaving things to go on as they best can; nursing your grief and disappointment and rage until you see every thing through a distorted

medium; you alienate my friends by your undisguised contempt; you affront my mother by openly spurning her proffered affection. All this you do, wilfully or foolishly ignoring the fact that in each and every act you inflict a stab on me—on me, slaving for you, loving you, adoring you!”

“Oh, Frank, Frank!”

“Yet one minute, if you please; I will not detain you longer; I should never have sought this opportunity,”—Barbara winced,—“but having it, I must, in self-defence, avail myself of it to the utmost. Not merely do you pursue the line of conduct I have just described, but you forget yourself and annoy me in a far greater degree. I am told of your constantly receiving visits from a gentleman during the hours of my absence from home. I mention this mildly, and beg you to hint to him to call at some other time. You are offended at this; and after a discussion, I acknowledge I may have been hasty, and the subject is dropped. I take you to a party where you meet some of your old friends; your spirits revive; you are more like your old self than you have been

since your marriage ; and you walk off, away from all the rest of the party, with this same gentleman, with whom I myself see you in singularly earnest conversation. I again speak to you on this point ; you deny that I have any occasion for complaint, and I again give way. And now what return do you make me for my kindness, my trust, my confidence ? You accuse me of receiving letters, which as your husband I should not receive ; and you demand to know the purport of the letters, and the name of the writer. I give a general denial to your suspicions ; but as to telling you what you require, my pride—”

“ Oh, even you have pride, then ? ” said Barbara, with a half-sneer.

“ Proper pride ! my honour, if you will,—for my honour was pledged in the matter,—forbade it. Then, acting on a wild and miserable impulse,—without one thought or care for me, for yourself, for our name and reputation,—you took a step which has brought misery on my life. You left my house, your home,—left it, and left me to be the talk, the object of the gossip, and the pity

of all who heard the wretched story. Not content with that, you came to this house, and I am given to understand that, since you have been here, you have been constantly visited by the man I have before spoken of—Captain Lyster!”

No drooping head now! Barbara is standing erect as a dart. Her cheeks dead white, her lips compressed, her eyes flaming fire.

“You have been told lies!” she said; “lies which, were it not to cure your madness, and to show you how weak you are, and how mercilessly you have been played upon, I would scorn to answer! So these dear delightful people have started that story about me, have they; have tried to degrade me in my husband’s eyes with such a miserable concoction as that; and my husband has believed them. It is only on a par with the rest of the generous sympathy they have shown me, and like all the rest of their wretched machinations, it has some slight shadow of a foundation. Captain Lyster *has* been here; has been here frequently,—oh, you need not raise your eyebrows,—it was not to see me he came. I will tell you, in self-

defence, what I would not have mentioned otherwise. Ever since Mrs. Schröder's trouble, Captain Lyster has been her kindest and most active friend. Before she was married he took the greatest interest in her ; and it was only her father's incontrovertible desire that she should marry as she did, that prevented him from proposing for her. More ; when you saw us walking together at that garden-party at Uplands, it was of Alice he was speaking ; it was to tell me of how her reputation had been imperilled by false and cowardly reports, that he had sought me out ; and it was to ask my advice and assistance, to enlist me on her side, that he was so urgent."

"How can I be sure of this?"

"How can you be sure of it! Did I ever tell you a falsehood in my life? You know perfectly well,—you would know, at least, if you had not been blinded by ridiculous jealousy, springing from suspicions artfully sown,—that I am incapable of deceiving you in any way."

"What brought Captain Lyster so frequently to my house, in the early days,—before the gar-


den-party at Uplands, I mean,—and why did he always come when I was away?”

“Shall I tell you what I believe brought Captain Lyster so frequently to your house, Frank Churchill? I did not intend to mention it; I intended to have spared you. Mind you, he never said as much to me,—he is too true and too honourable a gentleman to cast a slur on any one; but I honestly believe that Captain Lyster’s visits to me were paid through sheer pity.”

“Pity!”

“Ay, pity! He is a keen observer, a shrewd man of the world, for all his vapidty and his drawl; and I firmly believe that he pitied me from his soul. He had known me in other days, recollect; he had seen me when—well, there is no vanity in saying it; you know it as well as I do—when I was thought and made much of; when the world was to me a very light and pleasant place, in which I moved about as one of the favoured ones; when I did not know what it was to be checked or thwarted, and when all paths were made smooth for me. He found me soli-

tary, dull, wretched; in a dreary quarter of the town, which was utterly unknown to me; my only acquaintance, people with whom I had not one single thing in common,—people looking with horror on all I had been accustomed to enjoy, and enjoying all I had heartily detested. He found me *triste* and low; he thought I was becoming dejected and unhappy; not that I ever told him so, of course,—my pride is as great as his; but he is, as I have said, no fool, and he found it out. What did he do? In the most delicate manner possible, he tried to rouse me, and to show me what source of happiness I had in my new position and in your love. He was the only link between my old and my new life; the only person I used to see, who went among the people with whom I had formerly lived. Was it very extraordinary for a girl to ask news of those with whom the whole of her life had been spent? I used to ask Captain Lyster for such news; and he would give it me, always in the gentlest and most delicate manner; telling me, of course, of gnaeties that had taken place, but



pointing out how silly they were, and how happy the most fêted girls at them would be to settle down into a calm happy love, such as—such as he thought I possessed.”

“Did he say all this?”

“He did; and more—much more. Since I have been here, Alice Schröder has told me that on several occasions when your name has been freely commented upon, Captain Lyster has defended you with the utmost warmth, and with a spirit which one can scarcely imagine so naturally indolent a man to be capable of exercising. More than this: when the unhappy story of our separation became public scandal, I, having hitherto refrained from speaking to Captain Lyster about it, but knowing that he must now have heard all, was about one day to ask his advice. He stopped me at once. ‘Pardon me, my dear Mrs. Churchill,’ he said; ‘this is a topic on which I cannot and must not enter. The time will come when—when it will be all happily settled again; and you would then very much regret having discussed the subject with me. If it should ever

be my luck to be married, and I had—as undoubtedly I should have—a dispute with my wife, I would lock the door until we had settled it, and returned to our usual equable state. Not one living soul should ever be able to jeer me about a matrimonial quarrel.’ ”

“He was right; God knows he was right!” said Churchill, bitterly.

“And yet this is the man whom you have chosen to misrepresent in such a matter. Believe me, that people unfortunately situated as we are, could have found very few friends with the kind heart, the tact, and delicacy of Captain Lyster.”

And then Barbara, heated and fatigued with her defence, stopped, and her head drooped again, and she was silent. There was an awkward pause; then Churchill said,

“You sent for me to—”

“As I have told you—to confess that I had heard the statement made in the next room, and to admit that I was in error in imagining that those letters came from an improper source.”

Now was Frank Churchill’s time. One kind

word from him, and the misery of his life was at an end. But with that strange perversity which not unfrequently is a characteristic of good and clever men, he fell into the snare of saying and doing exactly what he should not.

“And you are prepared to come home—” he commenced, in a hard voice.

“Not if invited in that tone,” broke in Barbara abruptly.

“To come home,” continued Churchill, not noticing the interruption,—“to come home confessing that you were entirely in the wrong, and that you had no shadow of excuse for leaving as you did. To come home—”

“Stop, Frank!” burst out Barbara, unable any longer to control herself; “this is not the way to win a person of my temperament to agree to any measures which you may propose. To come home, confessing this and acknowledging that,—why, you know perfectly that you yourself were equally to blame in the preposterous jealousy which you showed of Captain Lyster! I will confess and acknowledge nothing. I will come home

to you as your wife,—to be the first in your regard,—to devote myself to you ; but I will make no pledges as to accepting other people's interference, or submitting to—”

“ In fact,” said Frank, “ as to being any thing different from what you were. Now that will not do. Much as—as I may have loved you”—his voice broke here—“ I would sooner live away from you than undergo the torture of those last few weeks at home again. It would be better for us both that—well, I will not say more about it. God's will be done ! One thing, I shall be able to make you now some definite allowance, on which you can live comfortably without being a burden on your relatives or friends. Sir Marmaduke Wentworth is dead ; and I understand from his lawyer that I am a legatee, though to what extent I do not yet know. I had hoped that—”

He was interrupted by a soft knock at the door. Presently the door opened, and the nurse put in her head, with an alarmed expression of face. “ Come, come !” said she ; “ quickly ! both of you !” and withdrew.

Frank stopped, and motioned Barbara to pass before him.

“Oh, no!” she exclaimed wildly, clasping her hands and looking piteously into his face; “not into the presence of Death!—we cannot go into the presence of Death with these wild words on our lips, this wicked rage at our hearts! Frank, Frank, my darling! fancy if either of us were summoned while feeling so to each other. It is a horrible madness, this; a wild inexplicable torture; but let it end—oh, let it end! I will pray for forgiveness; I will be humble; I will do all you wish! Oh, Frank, Frank, take me once more to yourself!”

His strong arms are round her once again; once more her head is pillowed on his breast; while between his sobs he says, “Forgive you, my darling! Oh, ought not I also to implore your forgiveness!”

CHAPTER XL

GOING HOME.

THE room lay in deep shadow, the lamp having been moved behind the screen. On its handsome bracket the Louis-Quatorze ormolu clock ticked solemnly away, registering the death of each minute audibly, and indefinitely forcing itself upon the attention of those sitting by, in connexion with the rapidly-closing earthly career of the sufferer on the bed. She lay there, having again fallen into deep heavy slumber, broken occasionally by a fitful cry, a moan of anguish, then relapsing once more into stertorous breathing and seemingly placid rest. In a large arm-chair close by the head of the bed sat Robert Simnel, his eyes tear-blurred, his cheeks swollen and flushed, his lips compressed, his hands stretched straight out before him and rigidly knit together

over his knee. This was the end of it, then ; the result of all his hopes and fears, his toiling and his scheming. Just as the prize was in his grasp, it melted into thin air. Bitter, frightfully bitter, as were his reflections at that moment, they were tinged with very little thought of self. Grief, unspeakable grief, plucked at his heartstrings as he looked upon the mangled wreck of the only thing he had ever really cherished in the course of his busy life. There lay the beautiful form which he had seen, so round and plump, swaying from side to side in graceful inflections, with every movement of her horse, now crushed out of shape and swathed with bandages and splints. The fair hair, which he recollected tightly knotted under the comely hat, lay floating over the pillow dank with death-dew ; the strong white hands, against the retaining grasp of which the fieriest horses had pulled and plunged in vain, lay helpless on the coverlet, cut and scored by the gravel, and without an infant's power in them. A fresh burst of tears clouded Robert Simmel's eyes as he looked

on this sad sight; and his heart sunk within him as he felt that his one chance in life, his one chance of love and peace and happiness, was rapidly vanishing before him. Then the expression of his face changed, his eyes flashed, he set his teeth, and drove his nails into the palms of his hands; for in listening to poor Kate's incoherent exclamations and broken phrases, Simnel had gathered sufficient to give him reason to suspect that she had met Beresford, and that he had somehow or other,—whether intentionally or not, Simnel could not make out,—been connected with, if not the primary cause of, the accident. And then Simnel's chest heaved, and his breath came thick, and he inwardly swore that he would be revenged on this man, who, to the last, had proved himself the evil genius of her who once so fondly loved him.

When Barbara and Frank entered the room together, Simnel looked up, and the bad expression faded out of his face. He, in common with the rest of the world, had heard some garbled story of the separation, and he saw at a glance

that poor Kitty's accident had been the means of throwing them together again, and of effecting a reconciliation. What he had just heard from the girl's mouth of Churchill had inspired in him a sense of gratitude and regard; and as he noticed Barbara clinging closely to her husband's arm, as she threw a half-frightened glance towards the bed, he felt himself dimly acknowledging the mysterious workings of that Providence, which, in its own good time, brings all things to their appointed end.

Frank and Barbara, after casting a hurried look at the bed, had seated themselves on the other side; the nurse, tired out with watching, had drawn her large chair close to the fire and fallen into that horrible state of nodding and catching herself up again, of struggling with sleep, then succumbing, then diving forward with a nod and pulling herself rigid in an instant—a state so common in extra-fatigue; and Simnel had dropped into his old desolate attitude. So they sat, no one speaking. Ah, the misery of that watching in a sick-room! the solemn silence scarcely broken by

the ticking of the clock, the crackling of the fire, the occasional dropping of the coals, the smothered hum of wheels outside; the horrible thoughts that at such times get the mastery of the mind and riot in full sway,—thoughts of the sick person there being watched, doubts as to the chances of their recovery, wonderings as to whether they themselves are conscious of their danger, as to whether they are what is commonly called “prepared” to die. Then a dreamy state, in which we begin to wonder when we shall be in similar extreme plight; and where? Shall we have had time for the realisation of those schemes which now so much occupy us, or shall we be cut off suddenly? Shall we outlive Tom and Dick and Harry, who are now our intimates; or will they eat cake and wine before they step into the mourning-coach, and canvass our character, and be tenderly garrulous on our foibles? Shall we be able to bear it calmly and bravely when the doctor makes that dread announcement, and tells us that if we have any earthly affairs to settle, it were best to do it at once; for it is impossible to deny that there is a

certain amount of danger, &c. &c. And the boys, with life before them, and no helping, guiding hand to point out the proper path? Ah, Tom and Dick and Harry, our old friends, boon-companions, trusted intimates, they surely would have the heart to look after the children? And the wife, dearest helpmate, true in all her wifely duties, but ah! how unfitted to combat with the world, to have the responsibilities of the household to bear alone? And then the end itself!—the Shadow-cloaked from head to foot! the great hereafter! “Behold, we know not any thing!” Happy are we to arouse from that dismal reverie at the sound of the wheels of the doctor’s carriage, and gaze into his eyes, trusting there to read a growing hope.

The reflections of the four persons assembled round poor Kate Mellon’s sick-bed were not entirely of this kind. The minds of Frank and Barbara were naturally full of all that had just occurred, in which they were most interested; full of thoughts of past storms and future happiness—full of such pleasurable emotions, that the

actual scene before them had but a minor influence. Simmel was pondering over his shattered idol and his dreams of vengeance; while the nurse, when for a few seconds' interval between her naps she roused herself sufficiently to think at all, was full of a cheering consciousness of earning eighteenpence a-day more in her present place than in one in which she had been previously. And then came the sound of the wheels and the smothered knock, and then the gentle opening of the door, and Mr. Slade's pleasant presence in the room.

He approached the bed, and surveyed the sleeper; crossed the room with the softest footsteps, and asked a few whispered questions of the nurse; then turned quietly back, and seated himself by Frank and Barbara.

"How do you find her?" asked the latter.

Mr. Slade simply shook his head, without making any verbal reply.

"The nurse summoned us hurriedly about half-an-hour ago," whispered Churchill; "but when we came in, we found her in the state in which

you now see her; she has not moved since, scarcely."

"Poor child! poor child!" said Mr. Slade, plying his pocket-handkerchief very vigorously; "she'll not move much more."

"Is she—is she very bad to-night?" asked Barbara.

"Yes, my dear," said the old gentleman, taking a large pinch of snuff to correct his emotion; "yes, my dear, she is very bad, as you would say. There is a worn pinched look in her face which is unmistakable. She is going home rapidly, poor girl!"

The sense of the last observation, though he had not heard the words, seemed to have reached Mr. Simmel's ears, for he rose hurriedly, and crossing to Mr. Slade, took him by the arm and led him on one side.

"Did you say she was dying?" he asked in a hoarse whisper, when they had moved some distance from the rest.

"I did not say so, though I implied it," said the old man; then peering at him from under his

spectacles, "May I ask are you any relation of the lady's?"

"No, no relation; only I—I was going to be married to her, that was all." He said these words in a strange hard dry voice; and Mr. Slade felt him clutch his wrist tight as he went on to say, "Is there no hope? You won't take amiss what I say; I know your talent and your position; but still in some cases, a second opinion—if there is any thing that money can do—"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Slade, "I understand perfectly what you mean; and God knows if there were any thing to be done, I wouldn't stand in the way; but in this case, if you had the whole College of Surgeons before you, and the gold-fields of Australia at your back, there could be but one result."

Mr. Simnel bowed his head, while one great shiver ran through his frame. Then he looked up and said, "And when?"

"Immediately—to-night; in two or three hours at most. She will probably rouse from this leth-

argy, have some moments of consciousness, and then—”

“ And then ? ”

Mr. Slade made no direct answer, but he shrugged his shoulders and turned on his heel. Silently he shook hands with Barbara and Churchill, then with Simmel, placing one hand on his shoulder, and gripping him tightly with the other ; then he walked to the bed, and bent over it, peering into poor Kitty's puckered face, while two large tears fell on the coverlet. Then he stooped and lightly kissed the hand which lay outstretched, and then hurried noiselessly from the room. Mr. Slade saw several patients that night before going to a scientific *conversazione* at the Hanover-Square Rooms—a noble lord, who had softening of the brain, and who passed his days in a big arm-chair, and made a moaning noise, and wept when turned away from the fire ; a distinguished commoner, who had given way to brandy, and was raving in delirium ; and a young gentleman, who, in attempting to jump the mess-room table after dinner, had slipped, and sustained a compound

fracture of his leg. But at each of these visits he was haunted by the pallid tortured face of the dying girl. At the *conversazione* it got between the microscope and a most delicious preparation; and was by his side as he drew on his nightcap and prepared for his hard-earned slumbers.

Slowly, slowly wore away the night: Simmel still sat rigid and erect; but the nurse was sound asleep, and Barbara's head had drooped upon Frank's shoulder, when suddenly the room rang with a shrill startling cry. In an instant all rushed to the bedside. There lay Kate awake, but still under the influence of some dreadful dream.

"Keep him off! keep him off!" she cried. "It's unfair, it's cowardly, Charley! I'm a woman, and you hit so hard! Oh, Robert," she exclaimed, vainly endeavouring to drag herself towards Simmel, "you'll keep him off! you'll defend me!"

"There's no one there, Kate," said Simmel, dropping on his knees by the bedside, and taking her hand; "there's no one to hurt you, my child."

"I was dreaming then," said Kate; "oh, such a horrid dream! I thought I—— Who are these?" she exclaimed, looking at Barbara and Frank. "I'm scarcely awake yet, I think. Why, it's Guardy, of course! and you, dear, who were so kind to me. But how are you here together? I can't make that out."

"This is my wife, Kate," said Churchill; "my wife, of whom you were speaking this evening."

"Your wife! ah, I'm so glad; I never thought of that; I never thought of asking her who she was; I only knew she was, oh, so kind and so affectionate with me; and it was because she was your wife, eh? Will you kiss me again, dear? So; and again! What a sweet soft face it is! Ah, he's been so good to me, dear, this husband of yours; and I've given him such trouble for so many years. So grave and so steady he's always been, that I've looked upon him as quite an old fellow, and never thought of his marrying. I—I'm much weaker to-night, I think; the pain seems to have left my side;

but I feel so weak, as though I couldn't raise a finger. You're there, Robert?"

"Yes, dear."

"Ay, I feel your hand-grip now! You must not mind what I'm going to say, Robert; you took on so before; but you'll be brave now, eh, Robert? I—I know I'm going home—to my long home, I mean; and I want to say how happy, and peaceful, and grateful to the Lord, I am. I've often thought of this time—often and often; and wondered—and I've often thought it would be like this, and yet not quite in this way. You used to talk to me about my rashness, Guardy,—in riding, I mean."

"Yes, dear Kate; and you always promised, and you never did, my headstrong child!"

"No, Guardy, I didn't, and yet I tried hard; but I hadn't much pleasure otherwise, had I? Robert knows that; and I *did* so enjoy my work! I've often thought it might come when I was with the hounds, and that would have been dreadful! All the business and bother in the field, and carried away somewhere, to some

wretched place, where there'd have been no one near to care for me; and now I've you all here, and that kind old doctor; and, oh, thank God for all!"

There was a little pause, and then she asked in, if any thing, a weaker voice, "What's become of the horse? does any one know?—the horse, I mean, that did this?"

"He was taken home, Kate; so Freeman said. He's a good deal cut; but—"

"Oh, don't let him come to grief, Robert! It wasn't his fault, poor fellow! He was startled by the—ah, well; it's all over now! Don't frown so, Robert; I ought to have known better. Lord Clonmel always said he had a temper of his own; but I thought I could do any thing, and—Some of them will crow over this, won't they? Those Jeffrey girls, who always said I was a park-rider, and no good at fencing, eh? Well, well, that's neither here nor there. You know all about the will, Guardy,—in the desk, you know? and what I said about your having—and Freeman—and the men's wages; and—"

As she spoke she sunk back, and seemed to fall asleep at once. The nurse, who had been hovering round, advanced and looked anxiously at her, laying her finger on her pulse, and peering into her face. Reassured, she retired again; and the others, save Simnel, who still remained kneeling by the bed, resumed their places. Then, stretched supine, and without addressing herself to any one, Kate Mellon began to talk again. Fragmentary, disconnected, incoherent sentences they were that she uttered; but, listening to them, Simnel and Frank Churchill managed to make out that her head was wandering, and that she was running through passages of her earlier life.

“Ready!” she said. “All right, Dolphin! Now, band!—why don’t they play up? No hoop lit yet! Get along, Dolphin! Ribbons now! Stand up, man!—why doesn’t that man stand up? So; give him his head—that’s it! Chalk; more chalk!—this pad’s so slippery, I shall never stand on it; and—that’s better. Now we go—one, two, three! All right, sir; all right, madam; told you I should clear it. Ah, Charley!

Hold the hoop lower—lower yet. What's he at? I shall miss it—miss it! and then—Slacken your curb, miss, or she'll rear! So; that's it—easy does it. Courage now,—head and the heart up; hand and the heel down! Oh, he's jumped short! —he's over! he's over!"

She gave a sharp cry, and half-raised herself on to the pillow. The nurse was by her in an instant; so were they all. Her eyes opened at first dreamily; then she looked round and smiled sweetly. "Kiss me, dear," she said to Barbara. "Guardy! Robert, Robert! kindest, dearest Robert, I'm—going home!"

Then, with tears streaming from both their eyes, Frank led Barbara away; while, haggard and rigid, Simmel knelt by the bedside firmly clutching a dead hand

CHAPTER XII.

THE DAY AFTER.

WHEN Mr. Simnel woke on the morning succeeding the night of Kate Mellon's death, he felt a numbness in his limbs, a burning, throbbing pain in his head, and a general sensation of prostration. He made an attempt at getting up, thinking he would string himself into vigour with his cold bath; but he found his head whirling—his legs shaking; and, after a severe shivering fit, he was fain to forego the attempt, and to get into bed again. Then he rang his bell, and told his servant to ask Dr. Prater to step round at once, and then to go on to Mr. Scadgers, whom he was to bring back with him. The servant despatched, Mr. Simnel lay back in bed, and endeavoured to give himself up to reflection. But the events of the last twenty-four hours had been

far too exciting for that; still lay stretched before his eyes the crushed and mangled figure of his loved one; still her last broken words rung upon his ears.

“‘Dearest, kindest Robert!’ she called me that—my darling called me that with her last breath. ‘Dearest, kindest Robert!’—the last words! never to see her any more—never to hear her voice again! All over now; all—No, not all; one thing to be done, and done at once—a settlement with Charles Beresford!’”

Simnel smiled very grimly as this idea came into his mind. It was not the first time that the idea had occurred to him. As, bit by bit, he gleaned poor Kitty’s incoherent story, as he knelt by her bed, he had rapidly framed his course of action, and indeed carried it out in his mind. He saw himself thrashing Beresford in the streets—saw the row that would take place thereon consequent, the desperate confusion at the Tin-Tax Office; and, through the perspective, had a distant vision of a long stretch of sand on the Calais coast—he and Beresford fronting each other

as principals, a couple of soldiers from the neighbouring *caserne* as seconds, and an army medical man looking on. He knew that Beresford was a man of courage; but he thought that he would probably refuse to fight in such an affair as this; therefore Simnel determined that no option should be given. He would not have a friend of his wait on Beresford with a challenge. He (Simnel) would pick a quarrel with him on some frivolous pretext, and insult him in the street. That was what he had made up his mind to do, and that was what he had intended to do that very day, if his sudden indisposition had not prevented him.

Little Dr. Prater found his patient very restless and tolerably impatient. "Well, my dear sir, and how are we? Glad I was at home, and able to come round at once. A fortunate chance to catch me, for there is a *great* deal of sickness just now amongst the upper classes. The tongue? Thank you. The pulse? Ah; dear me, dear me! as I feared—a galloping pulse, my dear sir, and a high state of fever! Have you now—have you had any cause for excitement?"

"Yes," said Simmel shortly; "I was last night at the deathbed of one very dear to me."

"To be sure, my dear sir; how came I to forget it!—Miss Kate Mellon's. Oh, my dear sir, of course I heard of it,—I hear every thing,—at least, I heard of her being very ill—impossible to live. Slade attended, didn't he? Ah, couldn't have a better man. One of the rough diamonds of our profession, my dear sir; not polished, but—all here!" and the little doctor laid his forefinger on his forehead. "And so she's gone, poor young lady! Well, well! Now, my dear sir, it's my duty to prescribe for you the utmost quietude. The least bit of excitement may be highly prejudicial; in fact, I would not answer for the consequences."

"When shall I be able to go out?" asked Simmel impatiently.

"Go out, my dear sir! Not for several days—perhaps longer. I will send in a nurse to look after you; for you must be carefully watched, and have your medicines at stated times; and I'll look in this evening. Mind, my dear sir, perfect quiet."

After letting out the doctor, the servant returned to his master.

"Mr. Scadgers is here, sir," said he.

"Then show him in," said Simnel, from the bed.

"Beg your pardon, sir; but the doctor's last words to me was that you was to see nobody but the nuss."

"Are you the doctor's servant, or mine, sir? Show him in!" and in Mr. Scadgers was shown.

"Hallo, sir!" said that worthy, regarding Mr. Simnel; "this is bad news to find you ill."

"There's worse than that, Scadgers; a good deal worse; as you'll hear. Your niece,—Kate Mellon, you know,—about whom we've had all the talk lately—"

"Ay, I know; at the Runner's—I know—well?"

"Dead."

"Dead!" repeated Scadgers, with a blanched face—"dead! how? when?"

"Last night; thrown from her horse; had

some row with a man named Beresford in the Park; horse was frightened; bolted, and fell with her. It was this cursed Beresford's fault, and—"

"What Beresford is it?"

"Charles Beresford of my Office,—Commissioner, you know. I'll make him remember that day's work; I'll post him at his Club; I'll horse-whip him in the street; I'll—I'd have done it to-day, but for this—this cold."

"Charles Beresford, eh? And it's him that killed my niece, is it? Horsewhip him, eh? you won't be able to leave your room yet; it's more than a cold you've got, if I may judge by the look of your face and the hot feel of your hands. Charles Beresford, eh? Ay, ay! ay, ay!"

"I'm afraid you're right, Scadgers," said Simnel. "I begin to feel deuced bad, much worse than when I woke. And to be lying here while that scoundrel will be getting safe away—out of my reach!"

"What do you mean, getting away?"

"Why, he's off to the Continent! I myself recommended him to go there, to lie quiet until his

difficulties blew over; and he'll be off at once,—to-night or to-morrow."

"Will he, by Jove! no, no! don't you flurry yourself, sir. I'll put a stopper on that. Charles Beresford shall be here whenever you want him, I'll take my oath. Excuse me now; look in and see you to-morrow." And despite Mr. Simnel's calling to him, Mr. Scadgers rushed off at the top of his speed.

Mr. Scadgers, albeit of a stout figure, and ill-adapted for exercise, never ceased running until he ran into his own office in Berners Street, when he sat himself down and fairly panted for breath. When he had recovered a little, he called to him the wondering Jinks, and said, "How does Beresford—Charles Beresford—stand with us?"

The little man thought for a minute, and then said, "About a hundred-and-thirty-seven on renewal; due the fifteenth next month."

"What's his figure with Parkinson?"

"Between eight and nine hundred; dessay more'an a thousand—renewals, judges' orders, all

sorts of things in that lot. Parkinson's clerk was here yesterday, talking about it amongst other things."

"Very good. Now look here, Jinks; you jump into a cab and bowl away to Parkinson's as hard as you can split. Tell him the game's up; that I've just learnt Master Beresford's going to hook it abroad. Let Parkinson, or his chief clerk, run down and swear this before the judge in chambers,—affidavy, you know,—and then let him instruct Sloman's people to collar Master Beresford at once."

"You want this done?"

"Most certainly I do; and rely on you to have it done at once. Look here, Jinks, you know me: Beresford must be quodded to-night!"

"All right; look upon it as settled."

"And more than that: learn, if you can, who holds his paper besides Parkinson, and to what amount; and bring me a list. Tell Parkinson that I've a feeling in this beyond mere business, and he'll understand. And bring me the list of the others."

Mr. Jinks nodded acquiescence and departed. As he went out of the door, Mr. Scadgers rubbed his grimy hands together, and muttered, "Better than all your horsewhippings and shootings. Master Beresford's broke up root and branch,—stock, lock, and barrel. I'll never leave him now until I've crushed him out. Insult my poor niece, did he? better have put his head in the fire at once!"

That afternoon as Mr. Beresford walked jauntily from the Tin-Tax Office, he was arrested on the *ne-exeat-regno* affidavit of William Parkinson, gentleman attorney-at-law, and conveyed to the mansion of Mr. Sloman in Cursitor Street, at which pleasant house detainers to the amount of nearly five thousand pounds were lodged in the course of the following day.

Mr. Scadgers, going to communicate his cheering intelligence to Mr. Simnel, found the portion of Piccadilly opposite that gentleman's door thickly strewn with tan, and asking Dr. Prater, whom he met on the threshold, for news of his patient, was informed that Mr. Simnel had a severe

attack of brain-fever, and that at that moment the doctor would not answer for the result.

According to appointment, Frank Churchill presented himself at Mr. Russell's offices in Lincoln's Inn; Mr. Russell, whose firm had been solicitors to the Wentworths from time immemorial, and who himself had enjoyed all the confidence of the late baronet. The old gentleman, clad in his never-varying rusty black, and still as desirous as ever to hide his hands under his coat-sleeves, received Frank in his usual icy manner, and bade him sit down. "I have here," said he, "a letter for you from the late Sir Marmaduke Wentworth, with the contents of which I am not acquainted; but which refers, I believe, to the will, a copy of which I also have here. Be good enough to read it, and see whether you require any information."

Frank broke the seal, and read the following, written in a trembling hand:

"Pau, Pyrenees, October.

"MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

"Two lines, to tell you two things: I'm dying—that's one; I've always honoured and respected, and recently I've liked, you—that's the other. They tell me you're a deuced-clever fellow—which is nothing to me. I've proved you to be a gentleman—which is every thing. I wish you were my son and my heir; but I can't make you either. I haven't got any son, and my heir is my nephew—I've no doubt a very respectable fellow; a parson, who collects sea-anemones and other filths, in dirty water and a glass-bowl—a harmless fellow enough, but not in my line. All I've been able to do is to leave you five thousand pounds, which Russell, or some of them, will see that you're paid. Don't be squeamish about taking it. I owe it you. I never gave you a mug when you were christened. My love to your dear wife. God bless you!

"MARMADUKE WENTWORTH."

When he had finished the reading of this

characteristic epistle, he told Mr. Russell of its purport; and heard from the old gentleman that the legacy named therein had been provided for by the will. Then Frank returned to Saxe-Coburg Square, and settled with Mrs. Schröder and Barbara that they should at once leave for Brighton, whither, after poor Kitty's funeral, he would follow them.

CHAPTER XIII.

AND LAST.

MR. SIMNEL was very ill indeed. Dr. Prater looked monstrous grave, and began to talk about 'responsibility;' so they summoned other two physicians high in esteem, who exchanged snuff-boxes, and looked out of window together, and examined Dr. Prater's prescriptions through a gold double-eyeglass and a pair of spectacles, and agreed that his treatment of the case was every thing that could be wished, and declined to commit themselves to any opinion as to whether the patient might get better or not. Frank Churchill, remaining in town until after the funeral of poor Kate Mellon, and expecting some suggestions from Mr. Simnel as to how and where the last rites should be performed, called on that gentleman at his chambers in Piccadilly, and discovered

the state of affairs. Then Churchill, while he remained in London, took to coming every day to see Mr. Simnel, and to learn whether any thing was required for him ; and, coming in to pay a farewell visit after he had seen poor Kitty laid in the grave, he met Dr. Prater, and heard from his lips that in all human probability the actual danger was past, but that it might be months before the patient would be himself again, so dreadfully had he been weakened and pulled down. So Churchill went away in better spirits, leaving his address at Brighton in case Mr. Simnel required any thing done which Churchill could do for him. Indeed Frank wanted a little rest and repose. As though his own domestic worries had not been enough for him, he had had to supervise the whole of the mortuary and testamentary arrangements of poor Kate Mellon ; and one other bit of business he had had to perform, of a somewhat more pleasing character.

In coming back in all humility to her husband's arms, Barbara had made no stipulations ; but when, holding her clasped in his strong embrace, he was

talking of her return home, she looked up imploringly in his face, and said,

“ Oh, if possible, not to the old street! oh, Frank, let us retrench in any way, but do let us leave that horrible neighbourhood !”

All things considered, he too thought it better; and as Sir Marmaduke's legacy had materially increased his income, he felt himself justified in looking out for some pretty suburban place, and half his days had been spent at house-agents' offices, and in explorations of houses to which he had been remitted.

Mr. Simnel's illness did not concern himself alone, but reflected immediately on the Tin-Tax Office. For at that eminent establishment things had been so long dependent on the one man, that so soon as he was taken away, unmistakable symptoms of collapse began to show themselves, and it seemed impossible that the business could be carried on. For in the discharge of the business of the Tin-Tax Office the grand thing was for every body to refer to every body else, until the whole onus of setting the machine in gear, of sup-

plying steam-power, and starting the engine, fell upon Mr. Simnel; and when he was not there to start it, it went off in a very lame and one-sided manner. This was perceived by "one of the public," one of those wondrous persons who, with nothing to do, are always on the look out to see Achilles' heel uncovered, or to spy the joints in Atrides' armour; and the person in question, who had been overcharged eighteen-pence in a matter of tin-tax, and who had received, in reply to an appeal, a letter from the Office in which the relative ignored the existence of an antecedent, and the verb positively declined any connexion with the nominative case, sent the letter to the *Daily Teaser*, where it was found so charming, that a leading article in the richest and fullest-flavoured style of that journal was specially devoted to it. This article was much quoted; and at the end of the week the subject was honoured by the *Scourge* with a yet more ferocious attack. The *Scourge* article happened to be read by the Treasury Secretary on Sunday morning as he was dressing, and that

astute official at once saw that something was wrong. Early the next morning his private secretary called at the Tin-Tax Office and learnt of Simnel's illness—learned moreover that he had applied for six months' leave of absence, thorough and entire rest and change being reported as absolutely necessary in the certificate. The next man, a political nominee, was worth nothing; and of the Commissioners none of them had the least notion of business save Sir Hickory Maddox, who was past his work, and Mr. Beresford, who had—well, there was no doubt about it, all town was ringing with it—gone entirely to the bad on racing-matters, and was at that very time in Whitecross-Street Prison. The Treasury Secretary was in a fix; he saw that the matter was becoming serious; that the Tin-Tax—an important department—was going to grief; that some member was safe to ask a question about the mismanagement in the first week of the session; and that therefore what he the Treasury Secretary had to do—and a deuced unpleasant job it was, too—was to tell the Chancellor of

the Exchequer how matters stood, and wait for orders. The Chancellor of the Exchequer received the news with a very bad grace; he was a nervous man and hated newspaper-attacks; he was a strictly moral man and hated looseness of any kind. He told the Treasury Secretary that Mr. Beresford must be written to to resign his situation at once, or he would be removed; and he stated that he was thoroughly sick of nepotism and 'influence' in the choice of nominees, and that a man must be selected to fill Beresford's berth, on whom they might really depend for the working of the department during Simnel's absence.

It was the result of these instructions that George Harding found himself in Downing Street, in obedience to a strongly-worded invitation, glaring over an old red despatch-box at the Treasury Secretary, and receiving from him the offer of that vacant berth. It was the result of his own honesty and straightforwardness that he declined it. "It wouldn't do, Sir George; it wouldn't do. I'm cut out for a newspaper-man,

and nothing else ; though I deeply feel the honour you've done me. No ; I must decline ; but I know a man who would be exactly what you require ; who—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Harding ; I was only instructed to sound you as to yourself ; and—"

"Pardon *me*, you know the man of whom I am speaking well enough ; he wrote those articles on the Russian question, for which Lord Hailey supplied the material, and with which he was so pleased."

"Ah, to be sure ; I recollect ; what's his name ? one may make a note of him at any rate."

"His name is Churchill. You'll find no better clearer-headed man."

Then George Harding went away, and for the first and last time in his life exerted his influence, and requested the return of favours which he had frequently granted. He must have been well satisfied with the result of his work. Three days after Harding's interview with the Treasury Secretary, Churchill, idling at Brighton, was telegraphed for to Downing Street. The next week the *London*

Gazette contained the appointment of Francis Churchill, Esquire, to be one of the Commissioners appointed for levying Her Majesty's Tin-Tax, *vice* Charles Beresford, Esquire, retired.

Mr. Beresford, pursued with the most unrelenting animosity by Scadgers, found himself opposed at every step,—even when, in sheer despair, he petitioned the Court,—and opposed so successfully, that he was remanded for two years. This period he passed in prison, and in cultivating the mysteries of rackets, *écarté*, and *piquet*, in the two last of which he became a great proficient. It is to be hoped that they will be of service to him on the Continent, whither, having eventually obtained his release, he has repaired; and where his gentlemanly bearing and knowledge of the world will probably enable him to earn a very decent income from the innocent young Englishmen always to be picked up in travelling.

Mr. Prescott married Miss Murray, and, for a time, lived in London, and attended his office with great regularity. But the old squire found he

could not live without his daughter, and simultaneously discovered that it was absolutely necessary that his estate should be more closely looked after than it had been. So, at his father-in-law's desire, Mr. Prescott resigned his appointment, and took up his quarters at Brooklands, where he and his wife are thoroughly happy; and where he discharges his duties of shooting, fishing, and hunting, to his own and his wife's great satisfaction. They have two sturdy children; a girl Kate, to whom Mr. Simnel is sponsor, and a boy Jim, who, under the guidance of his godfather Mr. Pringle, is already being indoctrinated into all kinds of mischief.

Dear honest old George Pringle is still single. "Time, sir," he sometimes says to Prescott, "has bereft me of charms once divine," laying his hand on a bald place about the size of a shilling on the crown of his head; "but I defy him. I and Madame Rachel are the only people who are 'beautiful for ever.'" He is very happy, having risen well in his office, and he still hates Mr. Dibb with all the intensity of former years.

Mr. Simnel, after some months, came back cured of his illness, but quite an altered man; his hair had become quite white, and his back was bowed like that of a very old man. Occasionally he goes down to see his colleague Mr. Churchill, or to spend Saturday and Sunday with Mr. Prescott's family; but his ordinary life is a very quiet one, and seems divided between his office and the True-Blue Club, in the card-room of which he is to be found every night prepared to hold his own at whist against all comers.

Mr. Scadgers still pursues his trade; but I hear that he is now considering the advances of a joint-stock company, who wish to buy his business, under the title of The Government-Clerks' Own Friend and Unlimited Advance Company (limited), and who propose to make Jinks manager with a large salary.

There is no Mrs. Schröder now, and no house appertaining to any one of that name in Saxe-Coburg Square. Captain and Mrs. Lyster live in a large house at Maidenhead, known to their friends as "The Staircase," from the enormous

size of the *escalier*, but really known as Wingroves,—a fine old-fashioned Queen-Anne mansion, facing the river, where they are thoroughly happy. Their son Fred is supposed by his parents to be a prodigy, and is really a healthy pleasant boy.

Near them is a little cottage with a trim garden, passing by which in the summer you will generally see a white-haired old lady, on a rustic seat, reading a book and enjoying the sunlight.

Then comes a shout, a clanging of the garden-gate, an eruption of children, wild cries of “Granny!” and the old lady is hustled away to find fruit or play at games. This is old Mrs. Churchill, who has never been so happy in her life.

And Barbara and Frank? They live close by in a charming house, with a lawn sloping to the Thames. Barbara has her brougham again; and all her old acquaintance have called on her, and expressed their delight at her husband’s good fortune with great enthusiasm. Miss Lexden, now resident in Florence, and a confirmed in-

valid, is perhaps the only one of her old set who has not so acted. But Barbara has not cared to renew the old connexions. Thoroughly happy in her husband, doting on her three children, her chief pleasure is in her home, of which she is now the comfort and the pride.

THE END.

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